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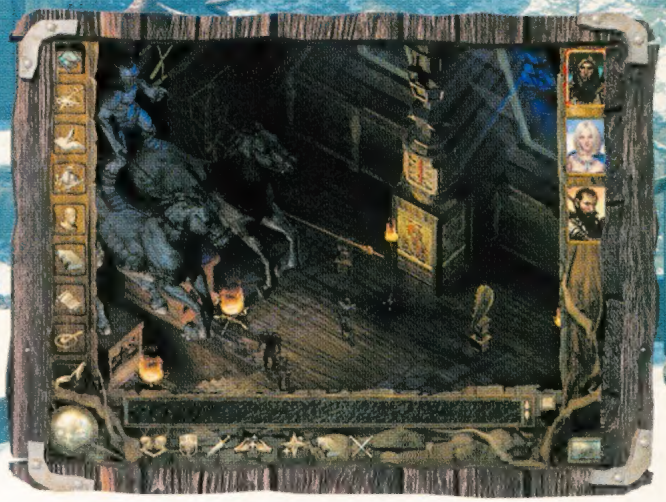

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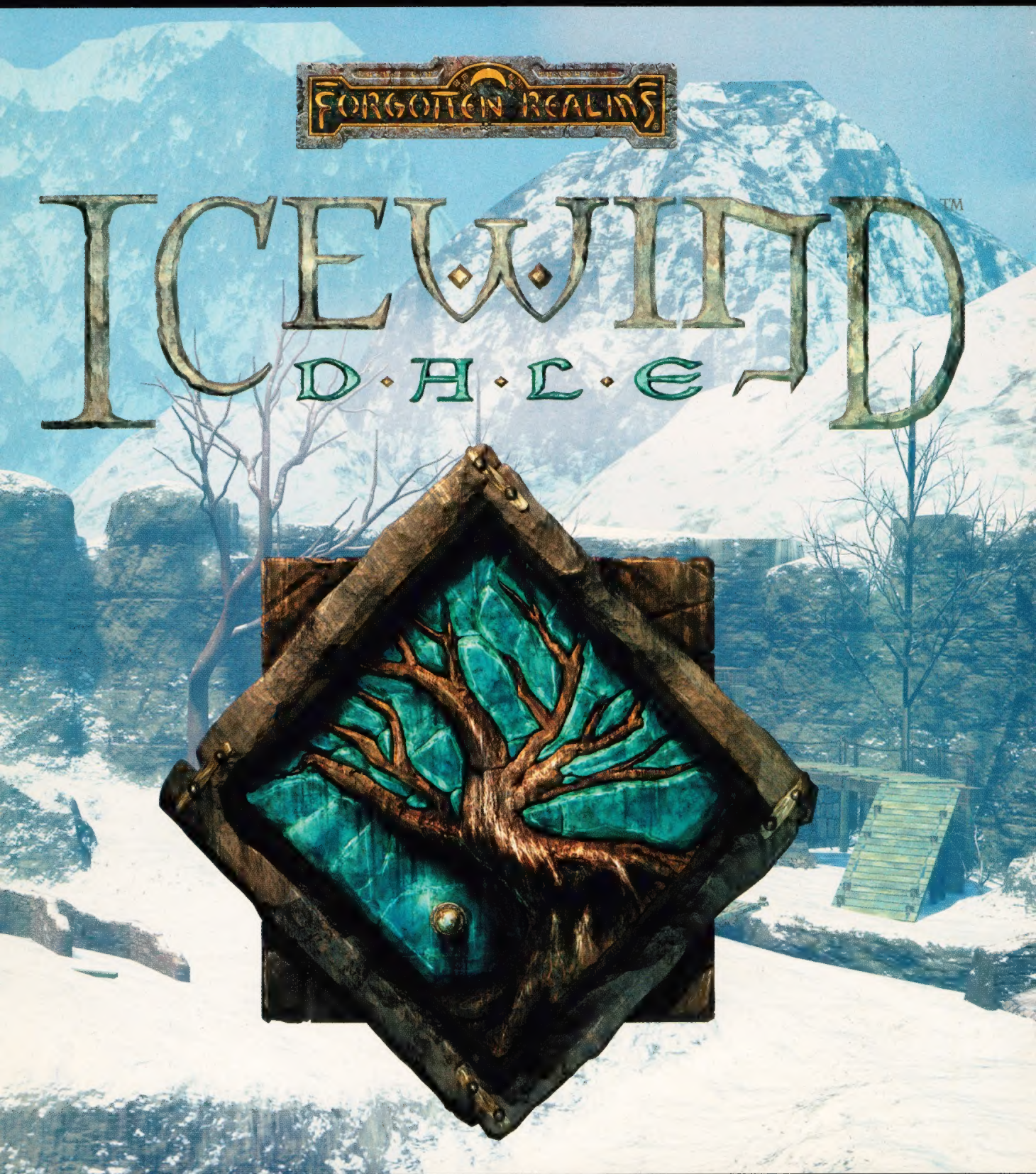

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3

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4

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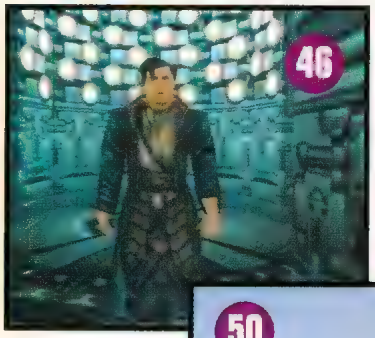

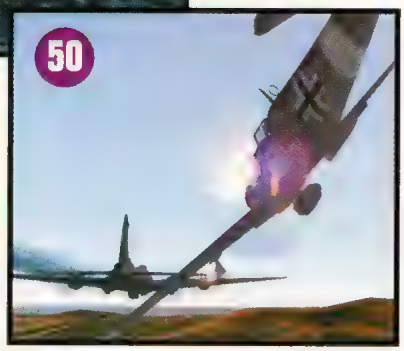

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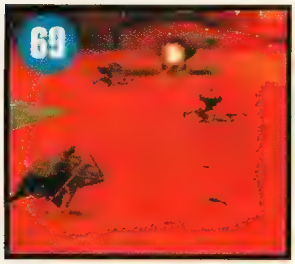

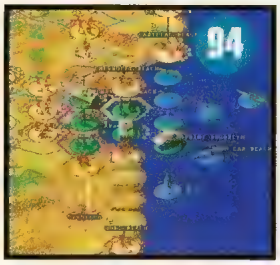

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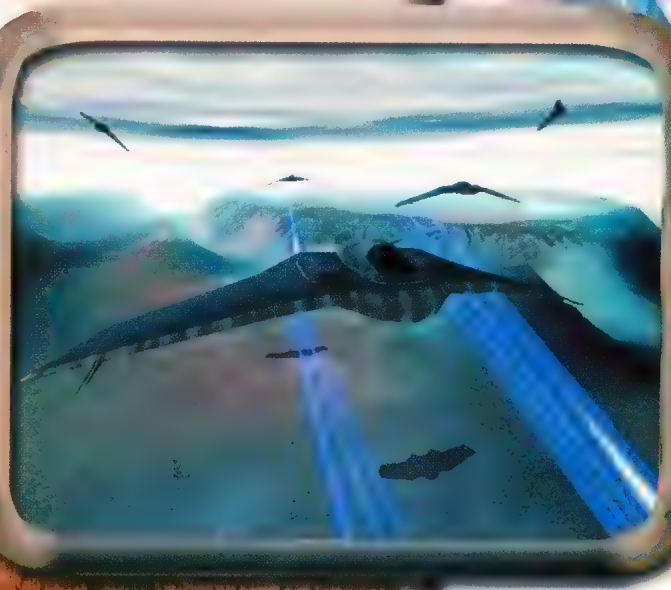

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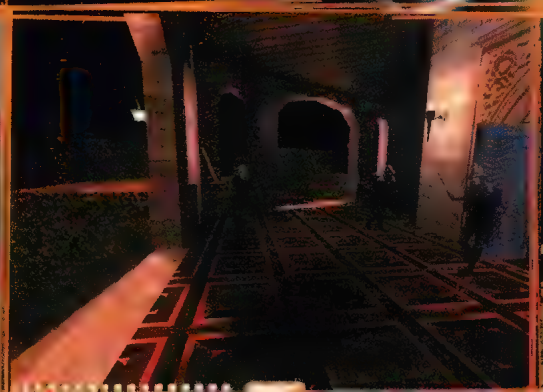

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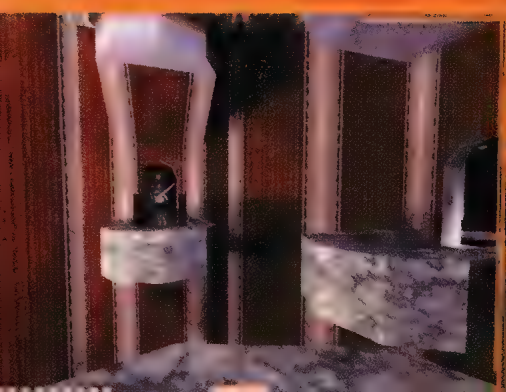

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Keeping Pace

I recently rented *The Fugitive*, and it reminded me of one of the very first Computer Game Developers Conferences I ever attended. The reason it triggered this memory is because at this particular conference, it seemed like everywhere I went, game designers and game companies were talking about *The Fugitive* and how they wanted to build games like that for the PC.

Well, it's been nearly five years now, and I still haven't seen anything close. HALF-LIFE, STARCRAFT, MDK, and maybe a few other games. Doh.

As we were putting together this month's magazine, I found myself thinking long and hard about this movie and what made it great. This thought, combined with a visit to the Ion Storm offices to take a look at ANACHRONOX (which looks amazing...see p. 46), opened my eyes to something relatively obvious but rarely explained: the vital importance of pacing.

At the movies, pacing is absolutely essential. When the director (or editor) gets this one thing right, the result is a highly watchable film like *The Matrix*—a gripping experience from start-to-finish that you can't wait to see again.

"At the movies, pacing is absolutely essential. When the director (or editor) gets this one thing right, the result is a highly watchable film like *The Matrix* – a gripping experience from start-to-finish that you can't wait to see again. Too many PC games miss this point."

Too many PC games miss this point. Instead of crafting an experience, we get levels and objectives that are just like the last level's objectives. There's no variance of gameplay, and rarer still is the storyline that can create pacing all on its own. And—going back to last month's save-game rant—dying again and again doesn't help matters any. Imagine if a movie kept replaying the same scenery or the same footage over and over again.

So here's hoping that Ion Storm's Tom Hall is able to deliver the goods with ANACHRONOX, and to redefine the concept of pacing. It's about time we got the gaming equivalent of a great action movie. CGW

George Jones

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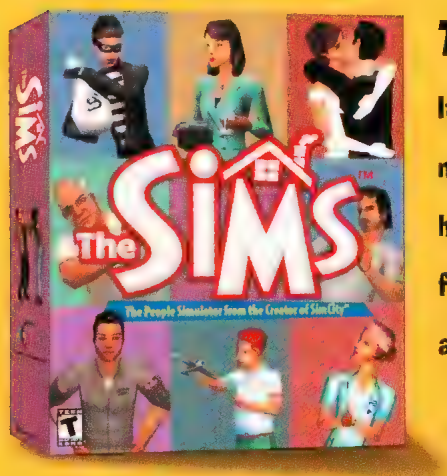

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ONLINE GAMING

LETTERS

Broken Britannia

We received a ton of mail agreeing with Jeff Green's March column, in which he chastized Lord British for allowing ULTIMA ASCENSION to be released unfinished. Many of the letters said Jeff wasn't harsh enough. Here's a sample of what you had to say.

I hopeth the Lord British bestows upon you the answerith you are seeking. Many of his pissed-off subjects would also like to heareth the truth.
BILL BINGHAM

Jeff Green's column about Richard Garriott's own lack of virtue put into words exactly what has had me, another ancient ULTIMA fan, bugged for the last five years. Having just built an 800MHz Athlon system with a GeForce DDR to play it on, I can now personally certify that U9 still only achieves 5-15 frames per second on the fastest PCs. I've never seen a game even one of our beasts couldn't help!
KELT REEVES
PRESIDENT,
FALCON NORTHWEST

It looks like Jeff Green got the response he was asking for. The exact day *CGW* fell into my hands, it must have fallen into Mr. Garriott's hands as well. His response was quick and final: All official message boards pertaining to Ultima IX have been closed. The official reason is that they are "moving on to other things." Translation: "The bad press we were getting on our message boards was hurting sales – therefore, we are closing the boards."

Mr. Garriott may not have actually spoken to you, but evidently he sure as hell did respond!
JACQUES CUNEO

I applaud your article to Lord British. It's a pleasure to see a magazine smack these guys around a little when a company sends out garbage.
GREG SCHWARZBACH

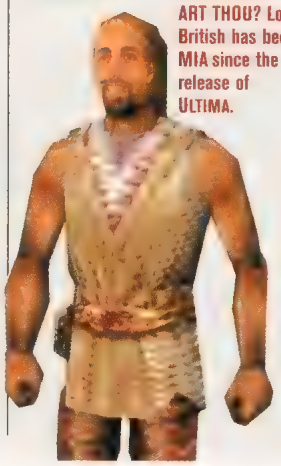
I believe that the reason Lord British hasn't addressed the ULTIMA IX fiasco is because the Origin suits told him not to. They figure that any admittance, even indirectly, to prematurely shipping the game would result in an open season for lawsuits.
DOC DREW

They closed the ULTIMA IX message boards without so much as a word – what does that tell you?
JOE MANIO

ULTIMA IX should never have been released in the state that it was. The "final" patch was released recently and the game still doesn't perform the way it should; it still crashes on my computer. EA tech support told me they don't know how to fix the problem. I am left with a game I cannot play, one I was hoping to play for a very long time.
MAREK TYRPA

I tried ULTIMA IX for about three hours before giving up in frustration. I installed the patches, but I'm still too fed up to even consider playing. I think Origin will never, ever get another one of my gaming dollars again. I don't care how good STARLANCER is, or how bad-ass the graphics are. All I care is how screwed up U9 was when it was released. It was such a stinking loaf of shit, I can't believe they even thought about releasing it.
RICHARD HENDRICKS
PS. UT owns QUAKE.

Jeff Green's column expressed my feelings quite well. I've been bothered to see so many magazines basically reprint the Origin Systems news release. It's nice to hear from someone who took the time to (try and) play the game. As a 15-year veteran of ULTIMA, it destroys me to see it end like that.
JOSEPH DRASIN



WHEREFORE ART THOU? Lord British has been MIA since the release of ULTIMA.

Athlon vs. Pentium

I would like to see a competition between two top-of-the-line PCs – an 800MHz Pentium III and an 800MHz Athlon, both tweaked out for some serious gaming.
MATT SHAW
We just received two such systems, and we'll bring you a full comparison test in next month's Hardware.

The Knock Against NOCTURNE

You condemned NOCTURNE as the worst game of the year, while many other magazines and Web sites are giving it best adventure-game awards, and I have to agree with them.
JARRETT MAZZ

I really think you crossed the line of professional ethics by referring to NOCTURNE as feces! (Coaster Of The Year, March, p. 90). Grow up fellas – this is neither true nor fair. I am a constant gamer, and I found NOCTURNE to be one of the best games I have laid my hands on.
MICHAEL AMOROSI

Fast Food Ratings

I'm almost speechless. I'm shocked that Taco Bell was used as a comparison to a five-star game in your March issue. This is a place where you might as well put your burrito or your Mexican pizza right into the toilet, and save yourself the agony. I had to put the magazine down as soon as I read this and rush to my computer to write you guys. Much like the way I've dropped many things after a Taco Bell disaster and made a mad rush for the toilet. In And Out or maybe Fatburger would have been my choice. Good call on Arby's, though. Fast food roast beef? The closest Arby's to me is near a pet store.
LUDOE

Games Of The Year, Take 2

Last month's list of *CGW* Games Of The Year (pg. 71) omitted LINKS 386 PRO, which won in 1993. Here's the corrected list with the right years for each winner. Thanks, and a tip of the editorial fedora to Sir Launcelot du Lake, joystick jouster and eagle-eyed armchair editor.

2000 Unreal Tournament (GT)	**1992** Civilization (MicroProse)
1999 Half-Life (Sierra)	**1991** Wing Commander (Origin)
1998 Jedi Knight (LucasArts)	**1990** Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse)
1997 Diablo (Blizzard)	**1989** SimCity (Maxis)
1996 Gabriel Knight 2 (Sierra)	**1988** Empire (Interstel)
1995 X-COM (MicroProse)	**1987** Earl Weaver Baseball (EA)
1994 Doom (id Software)	**1986** Ultima IV (Origin)
1993 Links 386 Pro (Access)	**1985** Kampfgruppe (SSI)

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Digital Anvil

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Top-Selling Games of 1999

Real Games Take Over—With Not One Hunting Title in Sight!

Popular appeal doesn't usually equate with quality entertainment, as anyone who's heard KISS or seen a WWF event can attest. But last year's top-sellers included some of the best games we've played in years. There was only one mass-appeal game in the Top 10—WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE—which could have been #1, if it had come out earlier in the year. In place of the "bubba games" and under-$20 bundleware packs of years past, there were nine games that gamers can be proud of.

The biggest surprise was the top-seller itself: ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON. Among all the action, strategy, and RPG games that have dominated the charts, a simulation about building rollercoasters outsold everything. Watch for the slew of theme park sims to come.

As is often the case, none of *CGW*'s Game Of The Year winners made it onto the Top 10 list. RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR was the best-seller among our award winners, at 240,500 units. Many of the other games came out too late in the year to make an impact (including UNREAL TOURNAMENT, HOMEWORLD, and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT). HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 and FREESPACE 2 had enough time to sell, but returned disappointing sales of 46,238 and 27,000 copies respectively. OUTCAST and MIG ALLEY sold fewer than 15,000 copies.

The overall market of PC games continues to grow, despite stiff competition from console games. Unit sales rose 12 percent from 1998 to 1999, according to PC Data, resulting in approximately $1.4 billion in total revenue. CGW

Tchotchke of the Month

Tchotch-ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.

This ceramic, bobble-headed Sammy Sosa figure was sent to us by 3DO in promotion of the next version of their stellar baseball title, SAMMY SOSA HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001. We're not exactly sure why Sammy's head is on a spring, or why it's five times bigger than it should be, but the net effect is just disturbing enough to earn our coveted Tchotchke of the Month award. Our beloved German garden gnome would like to extend a special "danke" to 3DO for providing him with such a friendly playmate.

Top 10 Selling Games of 1999

TITLE	PUBLISHER	UNITS SOLD*
1. Rollercoaster Tycoon	Hasbro Interactive	719,535
2. SimCity 3000	Electronic Arts	657,513
3. Who Wants To Be A Millionaire	Disney	592,655
4. Age of Empires II: Age of Kings	Microsoft	469,376
5. Half-Life	Havas Interactive	445,121
6. Command & Conquer 2: Tiberian Sun	Electronic Arts	419,533
7. Microsoft Flight Simulator	Microsoft	396,414
8. Frogger	Hasbro Interactive	391,346
9. Baldur's Gate	Interplay	356,448
10. StarCraft Expansion: Brood Wars	Havas Interactive	311,299

*Estimated numbers from retail sales. Source: PC Data Inc., Reston, VA

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

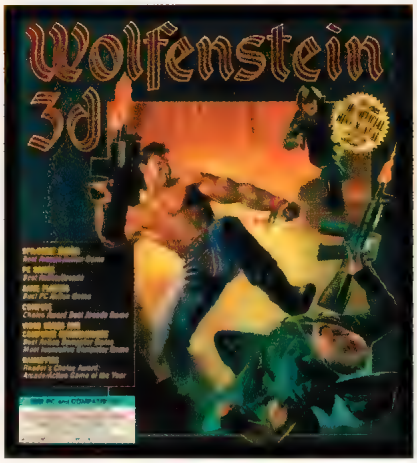
Activision Sequel to Wield QUAKE III Engine Against the Nazis

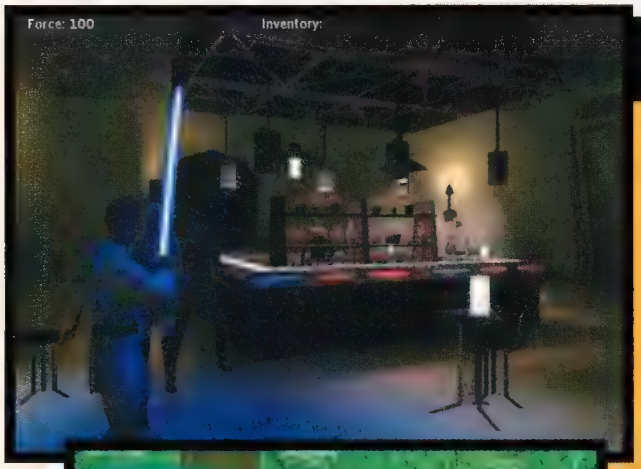
The game that kick-started the 3D-shooter boom is finally getting a sequel, courtesy of id Software, Activision, and a group of ex-Xatrix employees.

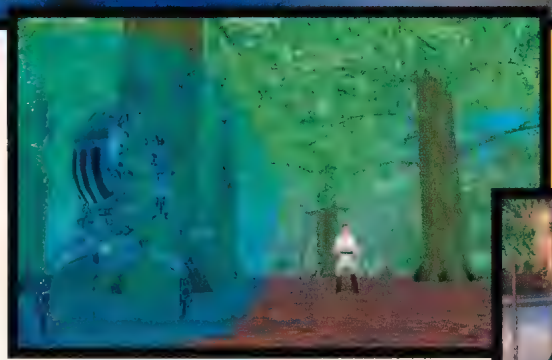
RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, which will utilize the QUAKE III ARENA engine, will place gamers in the role of B.J. Blazkowicz. Like the original WOLFENSTEIN 3D (released in 1992), this remake will pit you against the Nazis, challenging you to unveil and destroy their plans for world domination—which include bio-engineering weirdness and the occult. Unlike the original, the game's environments won't be solely contained within the Castle; according to Activision, the game will feature several different game settings. Multiplayer action will also be an integral part of the game, which could ship as early as December of this year.

Responsible for returning WOLFENSTEIN to its former glory is Grey Matter Interactive Studios, a newly-formed Los Angeles game design shop composed of former Xatrix (KINGPIN, REDNECK RAMPAGE) employees. The game's conception and design will be overseen by id Software.

Computer Gaming World will have exclusive coverage of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN next month.
—*George Jones*







Obi Wan Revealed!

Here are the first shots we've seen of LucasArts' OBI WAN, the upcoming first- and third-person game that follows in the footsteps of our 1997 Game Of The Year, JEDI KNIGHT. The first screen shows a Cantina on Tatooine, the second is from the Naboo swamps, and the third is from Theed.

OBI-WAN was originally slated for a Christmas 1999 release, but the game has since been pushed back to next year. We'll be sure to follow its development closely, but until we see more, enjoy these shots, courtesy of the Obi-Wan Network (obiwan.jedicore.net).

The GOOD...

DINK SMALLWOOD

Now here's something totally refreshing: a free game that's actually better than half the junk on store shelves right now. We'd heard of this RPG from Seth Robinson and his company Rtsoft before, but it wasn't until we downloaded the full game this month that we realized just how good it was: funny (really funny), with a nice old-school overhead perspective, and solid interface and play mechanics. Did we mention it's free? Download this game and remind yourself what pure hype-free gaming is all about. www.rtsoft.com

the BAD...

RED STORM'S EVIL POPCORN

File this under: Be Careful What You Wish For. Devoted Good, Bad, Ugly readers may recall that we waxed eloquent a few months back about the mana from heaven that is the Red Storm chocolate/caramel popcorn. Apparently Red Storm read it too, because the other day we received *six vats* of the stuff. Now every *CGW* editor is stuffed, sick, and bloated. We can't move, and our teeth hurt. (Private memo to Red Storm: keep 'em coming, guys!)

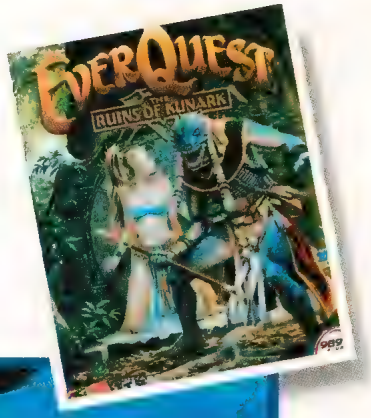
and the UGLY...

ORIGIN SHUTS DOWN ULTIMA IX BOARDS

Just when it looked like things were improving, Origin makes yet another bad decision. Shortly following the release of the third patch—which finally got the game in a somewhat playable condition—Origin announced that they were shutting down the bulletin boards on the official U9 website. Why? Because apparently, they considered the game finished. Well, guess what? It isn't. And tons of users still have lots of questions. But Origin apparently doesn't want to hear them anymore, so too bad for you. An utterly hostile, short-sighted, and arrogant move from a company that does not appear to have a clue when it comes to treating its customers right.

First Look at New EVERQUEST Expansion

More Crack for EVERQUEST Addicts on the Way in RUINS OF KUNARK



A WHOLE NEW WORLD Scenes from EVERQUEST's new continent. Just when it was safe to go to sleep at night...

We've got the scoop on Verant's upcoming expansion to EVERQUEST, THE RUINS OF KUNARK. The one thing that you veteran players have wanted to know is what the new level cap will be.

Currently, players can advance to level 50; In KUNARK, that cap will be raised to level 60. Each level increase will be much more difficult to achieve than in the base game, however. Verant doesn't want characters soloing dragons and walking around like gods among us mere mortals with our level-18 druids. There will also be some special skills, spells, and even titles for players who go past level 50.

THE RUINS OF KUNARK will add a new continent and a new race for players to play. The Iskar, an evil race, are lizardmen. One of the character classes available to the Iskar is that of the monk; they should thrive as monks, with their hand-to-hand attacks augmented by tail whips. Verant is keeping mum on more details, but you can expect 20+ new zones to play in, including new dungeons. The graphics are also being boosted a bit in the expansion, although only the new zones will take advantage of the higher polygon counts.

KUNARK is expected to be available April 20th. It will be bundled at retail stores with EVERQUEST and sell for $39.95, but current owners will be able to order the game directly from 989 Studios for a price that is yet to be determined. Players should receive pre-order notices when they log on to play. - *Mark Asher* CGW

CGW PROFILE

The Wizard of EVERQUEST Talks to the Peons at *CGW*

Brad McQuaid

1. First, the women in EVERQUEST are so...well, let's just say they take full advantage of the 3D engine. What gives?

I've asked Rosie Cosgrove, EVERQUEST's Lead Artist, about this many times...eventually she candidly told me that if she could really be an inhabitant of Norrath, that's how she'd want to look. Who am I to argue with that? (That they also appeal to males ages 14-30, who comprise perhaps more than ninety percent of our demographic, is purely coincidental).

2. What was the inspiration for EQ?

To make a lot of money creating a nerdy role-playing game, so that at our next High School reunions we could have the last laugh at all the guys who made fun of us for playing *D&D* in the library at lunch 20 years ago.

3. If they make an EQ movie, who will play your character Aradune?

Raph Koster.

4. What is the biggest complaint players have about EQ?

That although they've played the game for 16 hours a day for the last 10 months and have four level-50 characters, they hate the game and feel we're incompetent game designers. This sentiment is doubly expressed when our servers are down and they can't get in to play.

5. Has the success of EQ surprised you?

Very much so—even the most optimistic of us never thought we'd see this level of success. There was a lot of doubt as to whether an online-only, hardware-only game would sell well. Thankfully, the doubters were wrong.

6. What's next for EQ? Can we expect more expansions than Kunark?

EVERQUEST in its current incarnation is just the tip of the iceberg, as far as Verant's concerned. I think both expansions and sequels make a lot of sense, as do all sorts of massively-multiplayer endeavors into other genres. In other words, I can't say right now without getting into trouble, and will instead provide you with my canned, generic, but politely evasive answer.

7. Where will massively-multiplayer games be 5 years from now?

I think they'll be the most popular, biggest money-making, and most rewarding and immersive games around. And hopefully I'll be doing an interview with you about EVERQUEST 4.

8. I hate you for making this game! I can't stop playing and I hate you! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

No, because Verant's secret long-term goal is to slowly but surely utterly destroy society by addicting everyone else but us to online games, such that they never leave their rooms (future products will come with catheters and I.V.s). After which, of course, we will be free to plunder Earth's resources. You see, I'm just doing my job.

9. How often do you play EQ these days?

I was playing a couple of hours every night, but finishing the expansion and starting to design and think about those future titles I can't tell you about has cut into my playing time a bit. But I do look forward to moving to our test server with my guild to help beta test THE RUINS OF KUNARK. And if *CGW* gives our products a lot of coverage, I'll let you in the beta, too.

—Interview by Mark Asher

Sid Meier Goes Stone Age

He's Conquered Earth and Space—Now He Takes On Dinosaurs

If there's one thing that *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* proved, it's that corralling dinosaurs isn't exactly wise or easy. That, and you don't really need a script for a movie to make about three-hundred-gazillion dollars.

Now, gaming's own Speilberg is set to put his imprint on the whole dinosaur ouevre—Sid Meier is making a dinosaur game.

And while it's news any time Sid throws his cerebellum up against a topic, the real interesting thing here is the Firaxis Web site, which is running a designer diary of the project. Already this diary is head-and-shoulders above the usual online designer drivel. Just check out the second diary, which details the bonuses and drawbacks of both real-time and turn-based systems. But it goes beyond that one crucial decision to provide a glimpse of how game ideas are actually shaped, as well as giving its readers some insight into the design philosophy guiding Firaxis as a whole.

While we at *CGW* will certainly provide you with updates and details on this game as more become available, do yourself a favor and check out **www.firaxis.com/dinosaurs/.**

—Robert Coffey

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

April 1985

It was 15 years ago this month that we reviewed BEYOND CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, the sequel to the legendary CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, in which a stick-figure American P.O.W. had to sneak into a Nazi fortress and plant a bomb in Hitler's inner-sanctum. The two WOLFENSTEIN games were cult classics on the 8-bit computers, and were the inspiration for id Software's WOLFENSTEIN 3D, the game that started the 3D action-gaming revolution. Now, WOLFENSTEIN 3D is being remade using the QUAKE 3 ARENA engine, letting a whole new generation pummel the Nazis into oblivion.

10

April 1990

In this issue, we printed the results of a reader contest to write the wackiest mini-review of a wacky fake game. A winning entry: "Ancient Art of War at Three: This new program from Kinderbund is the ultimate combat simulation we've been waiting for—Pre-School. Not for those with weak stomachs, this game puts you inside the body of a typical three-year-old and challenges you to make it through one more day at the Early Earners Day Care and Career Training Program. Fight for blocks, eat someone else's snack, survive the gruelling nap, and then—oh no!—it's potty time again." Now *that's* wacky! And not a bad idea for an expansion pack to THE SIMS.

5

April 1995

Our April 1995 issue saw the induction of two important games into the *CGW* Hall of Fame: ULTIMA UNDERWORLD and WOLFENSTEIN 3D. Both of these games were among the very first attempts to completely immerse gamers into virtual worlds, and both did it very, very well. The influence of these games on the future development of gaming was immense. As mentioned above, WOLF 3D kicked off first-person action gaming, while ULTIMA UNDERWORLD was the spiritual father of story-driven, first-person games like SYSTEM SHOCK and ULTIMA IX.

64 enemies. 24 levels. 25 weapons. 4 time-warped worlds. 2 deadly sidekicks. Everything to feed an appetite for destruction and
So don't get too used to your weapon, your enemy or even your notion of time. Once you do, you're bound to awake in a whole

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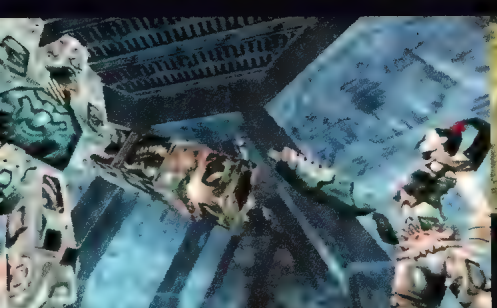

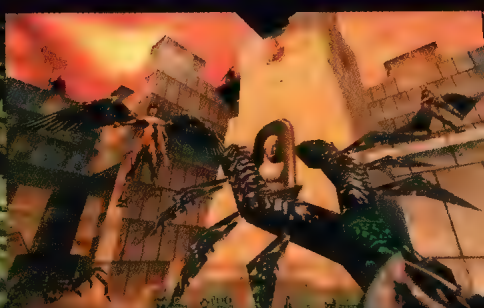

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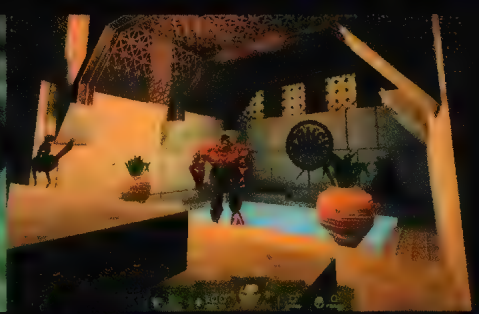
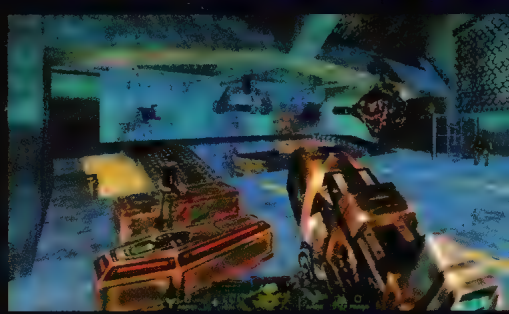




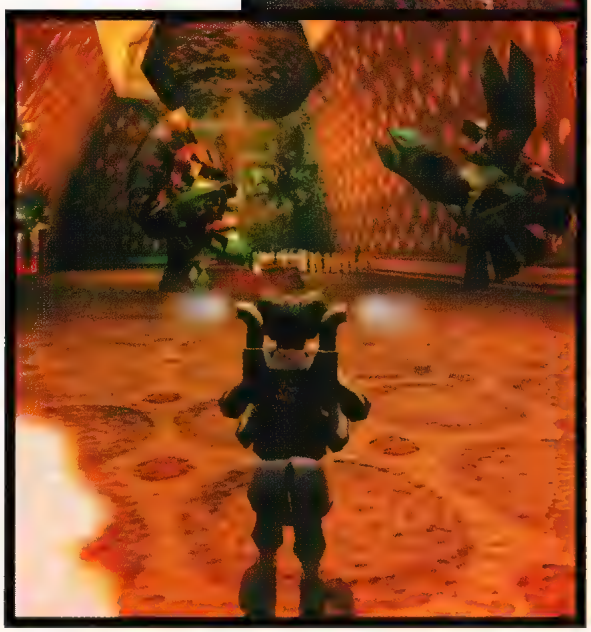
We Get Our Hands on MDK 2

Bioware Makes Good in Highly Anticipated Sequel

When we heard that Shiny Entertainment was not responsible for Interplay's MDK 2, we were concerned. What would happen to the game's quirky sense of humor and absorbing blend of action and puzzle-solving? The mid-stage beta we recently received put us at ease. Bioware, the developers responsible for the sequel (and also the folks behind BALDUR'S GATE), are doing a fine job of maintaining the themes of the original game.

In that game, you controlled Kurt, a silent hero with a cool cape that could inflate like a parachute, allowing you to leap great distances and use gusts of air to your advantage. Over the course of the game, a four-armed canine sidekick named Max—a character many fans of the game wished they could play—joined Kurt. The sequel does, in fact, let you play as Max. And Kurt. And for good measure, you get to play as Doc—the brain behind the scenes.

From our experiences with the game, MDK2 holds true to its action roots, but each of the three characters have different styles. With Kurt, you use his wide variety of weapons, sniper mode, and parachute powers to overcome the game's monsters, bosses, and geographical puzzles. Max is all about action, so you'll be able to make the most of his four arms, each of which can carry a different weapon. The Doc isn't too strong, so you have to take advantage of his high-tech gear and gadgetry. Although you can't choose which character you'll use on any given level (except for the last), Bioware is building three levels each for Kurt, Max, and the Doc.



After obsessively playing through about half of the game, and experiencing the hilarious cut scenes and levels that challenged both our reflexes and our minds, our early verdict is that—Shiny or no Shiny—MDK 2 looks like an improvement over the original game in every way.
—George Jones

The Dumpster Diver

CGW Looks Into the Bargain Bins for Some Good Deals

Okay, let's say you went and spent your hard-earned money on ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION. When you go back to the store to return it, you might try taking a look in the bargain bins. For three dollars *less* than a copy of UA, you can get six classic games, collectively offering several hundred hours of gameplay. Here's what we found on a recent dumpster-diving expedition to a local software chain-store.

TOTAL ANNIHILATION $10
Cavedog's inaugural strategy game effectively blends 3D gameplay with as many units as there are POKÉMON.

+ COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT $6
Westwood's slick Revisionist WWII prequel to their COMMAND & CONQUER games.

+ EF 2000 2.0 $10
CGW's 1995 Flight Sim Of The Year.

+ WARLORDS III: REIGN OF HEROES $10
Five-Star Installment of this classic turn-based series.

+ X-COM: UFO DEFENSE and X-COM 2: TERROR FROM THE DEEP $6
Okay, X-COM 2 was just X-COM with a blue palette, but it still beats UA.

= TOTAL PRICE $42

COMPARED TO:

ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION $45

The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

StealthMode

By Sneakalupagus

THE SIMS is the fastest-selling game in **Electronic Arts'** history. Since SIMCITY 3000 was the best-selling game of 1999, EA and Maxis are really on to something. All this time, developers have been thinking bigger, better, and faster, when they really should have been making a game where your character goes potty and brushes his teeth.

Even though HEAVY GEAR 2 was a sales disaster for **Activision**, HEAVY GEAR 3 is probably in the works. Why? Activision wants to cash in on the upcoming animated series based on the HEAVY GEAR universe. The next HEAVY GEAR may be quite different from the previous 'mech games, however. Activison quietly contacted some of the hardcore players to ask them how they would react to a more arcade-ish game. We've also heard rumors that the game might be something wildly different.

Meanwhile, **Hasbro** lost the rights to do MECHWARRIOR games when Microsoft snapped up FASA Interactive, so Hasbro's been in contact with Harmony Gold—the U.S. distributor of the *Robotech* TV show. No word yet on whether Hasbro has decided to get back into the giant robot business again via the *Robotech* route.

Codemasters and **Sierra** are talking about Sierra's cancelled BABYLON 5, but neither side is happy with the offers on the table. Codemasters U.S. is basically the phoenix that has arisen from the ashes of Sierra's Oakhurst division, shut down last year. They'd be a natural to do BABYLON 5; they've already acquired THE REALM and NAVY SEALS from Sierra. Codemasters is also interested in licensing *The Matrix* to make a game, but G.O.D. is also in the running for that property.

The top-secret X-box that **Microsoft** reportedly has been touring to game developers may be released next year. System specs still haven't been finalized but we expect it to be AMD-powered with a Nvidia chipset (TNT2 or Geforce 256), hard drive, and between 64 and 128MB of RAM. The graphics from this "PC in a box" could make the Playstation II obsolete. Another rumor has Microsoft threatening to buy up **Sega's** hardware business as a way to leverage the X-Box into the market. So what's the first X-Box game going to be? MONOPOLY?

Take 2 may have signed a licensing deal to make *Austin Powers* games, including a Mini-Me bowling game. Does Mini-Me bowl, or is he the ball? Let's hope Fat Bastard doesn't have his way with him.

Got a hot tip to share? Tell it to Mr. Sneaky at sneaky@zd.com. He's always there for you.

PIPELINE

Send updates to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

NEW	Age of Empires II Expansion Microsoft	Q3 00
	American McGee's Alice EA	Q4 00
	Allegiance Microsoft	Q2 00
	Anachronox Eidos	Q2 00
	Arcanum Troika Games/Sierra	Q3 00
NEW	B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	Q2 00
	Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Interplay	Q3 00
	Battle Isle IV Blue Byte	Q3 00
CHANGE	Black & White EA	Q3 00
	Blair Witch Project(s) [illegible]	[illegible]
	Comanche 4 Novalogic	Q2 00
	Comanche/Hokum Empire	[illegible]
	Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Q2 00
	Crimson Skies Microsoft	Q2 00
	Deus Ex Ion Storm	Q2 00
CHANGE	Diablo II Blizzard	Q3 00
NEW	Dogs Of War TalonSoft	Q3 00
	Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Q4 00
	Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Q4 00
	Evil Dead: Ashes 2 Ashes THQ	Q3 00
	Felony Pursuit THQ	Q2 00
NEW	Flying Heroes TalonSoft	Q3 00
	Freelancer Microsoft	Q4 00
	Good & Evil GT	Q3 00
	Halo Bungie	Q4 00
	Harpoon 4 SSI	Q2 00
	Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 [illegible]	[illegible]
	High Heat 2001 3DO	Q2 00
	Homeworld: Cataclysm Sierra	Q2 00
	Icewind Dale Interplay	Q2 00
	KISS: Psycho Circus G.O.D.	Q2 00
	Loose Cannon Microsoft	Q2 00
NEW	MechWarrior IV Microsoft	Q4 00
	Might and Magic: Day Of The Destroyer 3DO	Q3 00
CHANGE	Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Q1 01
CHANGE	Oni Bungie	Q3 00
	Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Q4 00
	Rock GT Interactive	Q3 00
	Sanity Monolith	Q2 00
	Settlers IV Blue Byte	Q4 00
	Shadow Watch Red Storm Entertainment	Q1 00
	Shogun: Total War EA	Q1 00
	Sid Meier's Civilization III MicroProse	Q4 00
	Silent Hunter II SSI	Q1 00
	SimMars Maxis	Q3 00
	Simon The Sorcerer 3D Headgate Interactive	Q2 00
	Sovereign Verant/Sony	Q4 00
CHANGE	Starlancer Microsoft	Q3 00
	Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster	Q2 00
	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Q2 00
	Summoner THQ	Q3 00
CHANGE	Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Q4 00
	The Longest Journey FunCom	Q2 00
	The Real Neverending Story Discreet Monsters	Q2 00
	Thief 2: The Metal Age Eidos	Q2 00
	Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Q3 00
	Tribes 2 Sierra	Q2 00
CHANGE	Vampire: The Masquerade Activision	Q2 00
CHANGE	WarCraft III Blizzard	Q1 01
	Werewolf ASC Games	Q4 00
	X-COM Alliance Hasbro	Q3 00

MESSIAH

EXORCISE YOUR RIGHT OF POSSESSION

How does a pudgy Messiah with only a diaper for defense find out the source of evil on earth?

Possession... Naked and defenseless, Bob uses his only weapon and takes possession of the first character he sees, a worker.

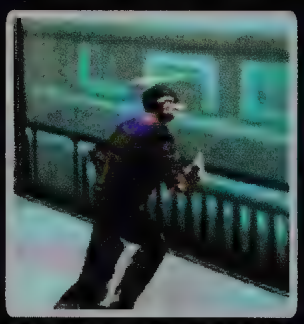
Bob, recognizable by the halo, realizes that the worker does not have security access to leave the room. So to cause a commotion, "Bob" lowers a 5-ton tank on unsuspecting worker.

Then he can possess the medic sent in to aid the crushed worker, medics have security access.

Now through a warehouse door, Bob still needs access to the lab where he believes he'll find some answers.

Dumping the medics body, Bob realizes that Cops have access to the lab.

Cops also have laser sighted GUNS! How heavenly!



While being scanned at the door Bob attracts some unwanted attention.

The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tosses his lifeless body across the room.

After seeing the awesome power displayed by the behemoth, who needs a cop. Bob takes possession of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!

www.messiah.com

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MESSIAH

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"Cover me, I gotta pay the pizza guy."
"I can't shake them. Can I get some help over here?"

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Microsoft

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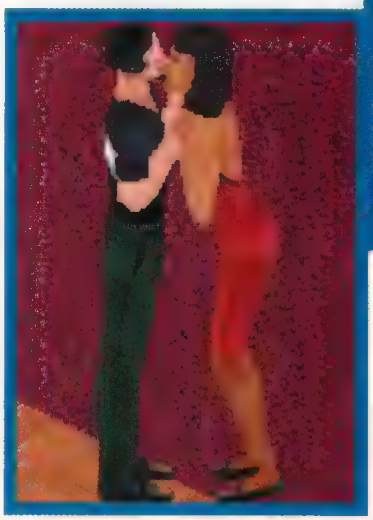
Meet The Sims

A First Look Into Maxis' Twisted Little World

HE'S LIKE ME, HE'S LIKE ME NOT Taking the day off to play computer games in my pajamas – that I can relate to. But there's no way I'd ever find the time to seduce the neighbor's wife with THE SIMS in my life.

Biff Kritzen has a pretty good life. He's got a good job, an active social life, and a nice house with creature comforts and the latest consumer electronic widgets. He has free time to paint, play chess, and dance with the neighbor's wife. He's healthy, rested, well-fed, and groomed.



Biff owes it all to me. I've spent the last four hours molding him, my first "Sim" in Maxis' THE SIMS, into the man he is today. I built him a modest but comfortable one bedroom/one bath cottage using THE SIMS' home-design tools. I furnished his pad, wallpapered, installed appliances, landscaped. I got him a job and nurtured his "charisma" and "logic" skills in order to earn him two promotions. Every day I make sure he's gone to the potty, bathed, brushed his teeth, made himself breakfast, washed the dishes, and fed the fish before the carpool arrives to take him to work.

Am I having fun? I've asked myself this a dozen times in the last four hours, and have never gotten a clear answer back. Designing the house with the house-editing tools—that was an unambiguous thrill. The first time Biff kissed Bella—the aforementioned neighbor's wife—offered a certain voyeuristic and vicarious satisfaction. But are these fleeting moments worth the day-to-day drudgery that consumes 90% of Biff's and my time? (A question one, in an existential mood, one might ask of one's own life. THE SIMS world is constantly reflecting back on the real world, and vice-versa, in bizarre and unsettling ways.) Your sims will do their daily duties without your assistance, but they are terrible at it. If you want to "succeed," which means earning more money to buy more stuff, you have to direct *every* action the sim makes: *every* trip to the bathroom, *every* meal, *every* click of the TV remote control.

I'll keep playing in spite of the little voice in my head telling me what an absurdity it is to be putting so much time into improving a digital creature's life at the expense of my own. And, the vaguely uncomfortable notion that I've been ensorcelled into spending time doing exactly the things I play games to avoid. There's something about this game that will draw people in—especially people who don't normally play games—and keep them playing, even if playing makes their real lives living hells.

Look for our full review of THE SIMS in the next *CGW*.

—Chris Lombardi

Reality Check: Special Games Of The Year Edition!

1999 was a great year for computer gaming—maybe too great. Look at the compilation of awards handed out by the various gaming publications below, and you will see a rather striking lack of consensus, especially where the Game Of The Year itself is concerned. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 was the only game to receive more than one vote for the top award—a big change from last year's near-unanimous acclaim for HALF-LIFE. But you know what? This is a good thing. It proves there were good games a'plenty, and it also proves that though gaming editors may all look (and smell) alike, we do not all think alike.

	Game of Year	Action	Strategy	RPG	Adventure	Sim	Sports
CGW	Unreal Tournament	Rogue Spear	Homeworld	Planescape: Torment	Outcast	MiG Alley	High Heat 2000
PC Gamer	Homeworld	Rogue Spear	Age of Empires 2*/ Alpha Centauri**	System Shock 2	(no award given)	MiG Alley	High Heat 2000
CGM	System Shock 2	Unreal Tournament	Age of Empires 2*/ Rollercoaster Tycoon**	Planescape: Torment	Gabriel Knight III	MiG Alley	High Heat 2000
PCXL	Quake III Arena	–	–	–	–	–	–
Gamespot	EverQuest	Unreal Tournament	Age of Empires 2	Planescape: Torment	Outcast	MiG Alley	High Heat 2000
Gamecenter	System Shock 2	System Shock 2	Homeworld*/ Alpha Centauri**	Asheron's Call	Gabriel Knight III	MiG Alley	NHL 2000

*real-time strategy award ** turn-based strategy award

Note: PC Accelerator did not hand out genre-specific awards this year.

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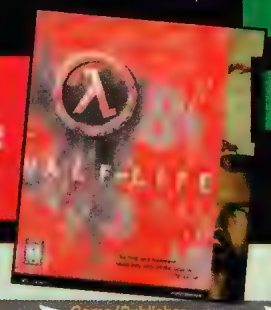
CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

Top 40



1 Half-Life
Havas Interactive
5 stars

This Month	Last Month	Game/Publisher	CGW Rating
2	3	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
3	4	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
4	2	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
5	5	**Unreal Tournament** GT	5
6	6	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
7	8	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
8	9	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
9	10	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
10	7	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
11	13	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
12	11	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
13	16	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
14	14	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
15	17	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5
16	12	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
17	15	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
18	23	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
19	20	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
20	18	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
21	27	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
22	19	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
23	24	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
24	21	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
25	33	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
26	29	**Aliens vs. Predator** Fox	3
27	28	**EverQuest** Sony	4
28	26	**Myth 2** Bungie	4.5
29	30	**Caesar III** Havas Interactive	4.5
30	25	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
31	32	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
NEW	32	–	**Railroad Tycoon II** G.O.D.	4.5
NEW	33	–	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
34	31	**Might and Magic VII**	4.5
35	38	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
36	39	**Wing Commander Prophecy Gold** Origin/EA	4
37	36	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
38	–	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
39	35	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
40	22	**Need for Speed 4: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5

NEW POLLING PLACE!
Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

Although we take a fresh poll each month, HALF-LIFE, STARCRAFT, and BALDUR'S GATE have owned the top three for months. Finally, this month, BALDUR'S GATE got knocked out of the number-three slot by world-beater AGE II. Meanwhile, UNREAL TOURNAMENT continues to be more popular than QUAKE III, despite the howling of the QUAKE camp on the newsgroups. Also noteworthy is HOMEWORLD's debut at #33. Watch for it to climb as word spreads that it's one of the most innovative and atmospheric strategy games ever.

Top Action Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Unreal Tournament** GT	5
NEW	3	3	**Quake III Arena** Activision	4.5
4	4	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
5	5	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

1	1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	2	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
3	5	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
4	3	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
5	4	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5

Top Simulations Games

NEW	1	1	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
2	2	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
3	3	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
4	5	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
5	4	**Heavy Gear II** Activision	4.5

Top Sports/Racing Games

1	3	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
2	2	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
3	1	**Need For Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
NEW	4	5	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4
5	4	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5

Top Strategy/War Games

1	1	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	3	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
4	5	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
5	4	**Heroes Of Might And Magic III** 3DO	4.5

Anachronox

Tom Hall and Ion Storm Prepare to Blow FINAL FANTASY Into Outer Space by George Jones

THE GREAT OUTDOORS Part of Ion Storm's goal with ANACHRONOX is to create an epic adventure; to this end, the game will take you to all sorts of different environments, outdoor and indoor.

Veteran game designer Tom Hall is into ANACHRONOX. Really, really into it. When we sat down with him at Ion Storm's impressive penthouse office suite in Dallas, he went to great lengths to make sure we got as intimate with the game as we could. This included his personal voice-overs for every single line of dialogue in the game, *in character*. So when Sly Boots' robot sidekick asked, "Do you want to see my batteries?" Hall visibly stiffened and intoned the line through his nose.

Hey, at least he can rest assured that if the whole game-design thing doesn't work out, he'll have a career in voice-acting. Not that he needs to worry. Even at this early stage, ANACHRONOX's unique blend of humor and story appear to transcend current state-of-the-art gaming – not necessarily technologically, but in a far more critical category: gameplay.

ANACHRONOX, in fact, could be one of those rarities that causes everyone in the game industry to sit up and take notice.

Science Fiction With an Edge

The strangely named ANACHRONOX is the ghost town of a city where the game begins. This strange, at times gravity-defying place actually rests inside a hollowed-out planet that functions as a sort of interplanetary hyperspace hub. The planet's surface is littered with huge spikes, each of which serves as a hyperspace accelerator into a different part of the galaxy.

The game's initially-trippy setting serves two functions. First off, it's just plain cool – and features the kind of hard-edged science fiction that rarely makes its way into the RPG genre. Second, it kick-starts the game with a bit of intrigue and mystery. From the moment you set foot into the game universe, you're going to want to know the answer to one very powerful question: Why?

Sly Boots is the trenchcoat-wearing, slightly frayed hero through whom you'll piece together all the answers by taking on different missions and quests, and by travel-

ANACHRONOX
GENRE: Action/Adventure • RELEASE DATE: Q2 00
PUBLISHER: Ion Storm
DEVELOPER: Ion Storm
CONTACT: www.ionstorm.com

ling through those cool spiky hyperspace accelerators, into even cooler locales.

Although Sly will encounter plenty of different folks along his excellent adventure (you may have up to seven different people in your party, although you'll only have three or four at one time), one constant companion is Fatima, the game's 3D interface. Fatima was once Sly's real-life personal assistant. When she died, Sly had her digitized into immortality...against her will. The end result is a unique, if slightly bitchy, game interface. In addition to keeping track of goals and quests, Fatima also records key parts of your conversations and can make snapshots of important moments in the game.

Here, I should probably take a moment to point out – in case you missed it – that there's nothing conventional about ANACHRONOX.

Final Fantasy

One mainstay that doesn't change much is the way you play the game. You use your mouse and keyboard to move Sly around in third-person. As he makes contact with various non-player characters, he interacts with them and occasionally recruits them to his side.

Ion Storm must be quietly hoping that the most significant difference in ANACHRONOX, however, will be one that gamers are not even conscious of. Too many PC games – be they action, adventure, or RPG – fall short when it comes to the entire experience. Jump, shoot, and unlock the door. Load up on weapons; enter the dungeon and stay there till you're about to die; then get out of there and heal yourself.

In Hollywood, moviemakers talk about pacing as integral to a movie's success. The same goes for gaming, although the pacing tends to involve more gameplay than plot development. Take HALF-LIFE, or even EARTHWORM JIM for that matter – titles that changed pace by throwing widely varying types of action, puzzles, or objectives at us.

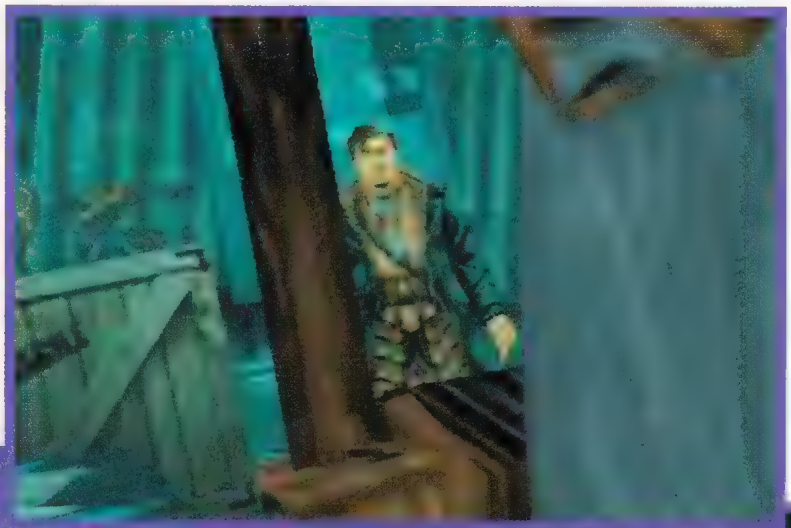
In order to accomplish this, ANACHRONOX' design calls for an incredible amount of variation, both in terms of character motivation and how you play the game. In one mission, for example, you might have to escape from a laboratory before some dreaded events go down. In another, you might have to use your detective skills to trail a character, taking pictures of him in compromising positions. At one point in the game, you'll play a mini-game that involves piloting your ship through some rather treacherous airspace. You'll go into ANACHRONOX' tunnels accompanied by an old guy named Grumps. You'll encounter an Escher-esque environment known as The Brick, where gravity has no home.

And you'll fight when you have to. But even the game's combat system will attempt to transcend the going PC-gaming norms.

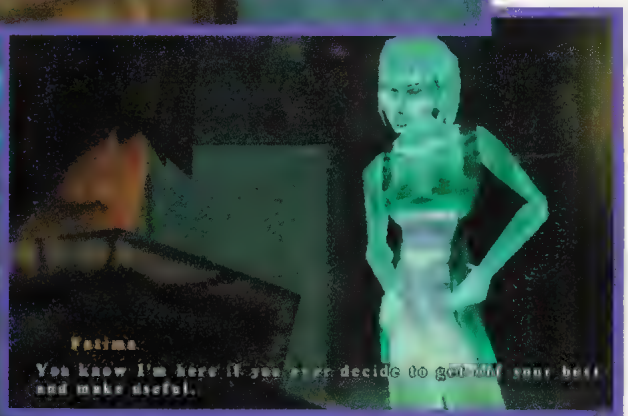
Battle Master

Unlike games like FINAL FANTASY – or even more action-oriented games like SYSTEM SHOCK – combat will not randomly occur in ANACHRONOX. Instead, at predefined points in the game, you'll find yourself in scrape-ups.

The combat system itself is a tactically-oriented blend of FINAL FANTASY and X-COM. You move your characters around in a sort of real-time phased turn. Characters' agility ratings determine how much



SAY YOU, SAY ME



Sly Boots, the game's hero, has to deal with all kinds of characters, some of whom will join his party. With him at all times, however, is Fatima – the game's not-so-friendly interface.

MARCH 2000. THE WORLD FALLS INTO SHADOW —
BAIKONUR, RUSSIA
I CAN GET YOUR TEAM AS FAR AS A MEETING WITH TATYANA.
BUT YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN AFTER THAT.
THANKS FOR YOUR HELP, BOLAT.
ANYTHING FOR MY FRIENDS. SORRY I CANNOT JOIN YOU. I'M AFRAID THAT'S NOT MY KIND OF HUNT.
HEAD SOUTH, GUYS
HER OFFICE IS UP ON THE RIGHT.
WE NEED A SECOND OF YOUR TIME, TATYANA.
GET OUT OF HERE! IT'S TOO DANGEROUS —
SURPRISE. YOUR FRIEND BOLAT IS NO FRIEND, COMMANDOS.
WELCOME TO MY LITTLE TRAP.
EVER HEARD OF BACK-UP, COMRADE?
INTERROGATION. CONVERSATION. COMBAT.
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Red Storm
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
TEEN (13+)
Descriptor(s)
Animated Violence
SHADOW WATCH™

time they have to move and attack.

The most interesting feature is how you can utilize the environment to your advantage. Depending on where you are, you might turn a wheel to ignite a flaming vent. Maybe you'll destroy the boxes your opponent is standing on top of, causing him to fall to the floor. Or perhaps you'll activate an electric bridge so you can gain access to a more sheltered area.

The interesting thing about the combat system is that its non-random nature allows for the designers to craft a much stronger AI than in a traditional RPG (the AI won't behave exactly the same in every battle, however). You won't be bogged down with countless annoying random attacks as you travel around; you can focus on accomplishing your goals. The only flaw I can fathom is that there may not be enough battle sequences. But given how big the ANACHRONOX universe seems, I doubt it.

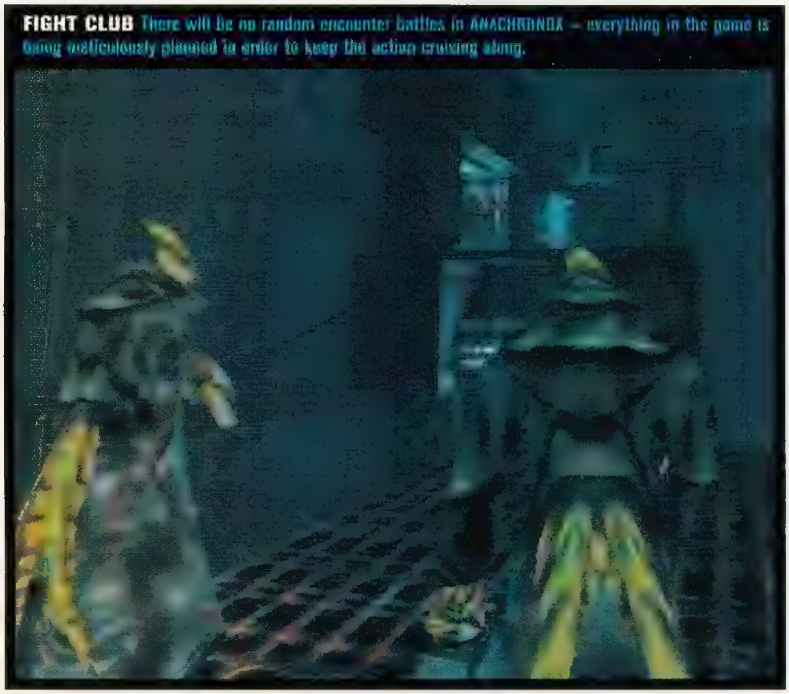
As you play through the game, characters will gain their own set of battle skills and become more and more powerful. In addition to the traditional method of increasing ratings in predefined skills (Wisdom, Might, etc.), ANACHRONOX characters will also learn new skills as they progress. For example, at the beginning of the game, Sly can't even attack until he learns Beat, at which point he'll also learn Block.

ANACHRONOX also features a magic system of sorts based on something called MysTech, but Hall is keeping close-lipped about this for the time being.

Need...More...Space...

When you get down to it, there's so much more to be said about the ANACHRONOX – which somehow manages to conjure up images of *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, FINAL FANTASY VII and VIII, and HALF-LIFE all at the same time. Like how the game's different characters will have their own personal story arcs, as well as various subquests that will require you to control them individually. Or how the game features automap 'Bots that can lead you to the places you need to be so that you don't get lost. And how the game will feature almost 20 mini-games that will pop up at various times. And, and, and... CGW

APE GIVES BIRTH TO OX Tom Hall's ANACHRONOX Programming Environment (APE) allows the design team to create cool mini-games like Ox, a simple strategy game that pops up early on. By itself, Ox (designed by Hall) is so addictive that the entire ANACHRONOX team got hooked on it.



FIGHT CLUB There will be no random encounter battles in ANACHRONOX – everything in the game is being meticulously planned in order to keep the action cruising along.

Tom Hall's Gameography

Tom Hall has worked on over 40 different titles. Here are the highlights:

- **The Seven Keys** (1987, Softdisk)
- **Aztec Temple** (1988, Softdisk)
- **Rescue Rover II** (1990, Softdisk)
- **Commander Keen** (1990-1991, id Software/Apogee)
- **Wolfenstein 3D** (1992, id Software)
- **Spear of Destiny** (1992, id Software)
- **DOOM** (1993, id Software)
- **Duke Nukem II** (1993, Apogee Software)
- **Rise of the Triad** (1994, Apogee Software)
- **Extreme Rise of the Triad** (1995, Apogee Software)
- **Terminal Velocity** (1995, 3D Realms)

HELLHOUND ON MY TRAIL This Me-109 has already wounded the B-17, but help is on the way.

'The Mighty Eighth' Takes Co-op Multiplayer to New Heights

By Dave Salvator

B-17 Flying Fortress II

The Boeing B-17 is the stuff of legend. Armored and equipped with 13 .50-caliber machine guns and self-sealing gasoline tanks, the B-17 proved itself an outstanding bomber that excelled in the most vital aspect of air combat: survival. Countless B-17s came home from bombing runs over France and Germany with seemingly more holes than fuselage, but they came home.

Now, British software studio Wayward Design wants to show you what it was like to man one of these flying forts. Perhaps this year's most anticipated flight sim, B-17 probably won't become famous for its advanced graphics engine. Although the graphics are superb, what makes B-17 stand out is where it's taking multiplayer flight simming. The B-17 carried a crew of six to ten men, and in FLYING FORTRESS II, you and up to ten others can each man a position of the B-17 for action over the European theatre in WWII.

B-17 FLYING FORTRESS II
GENRE: Simulation • RELEASE DATE: May 00
PUBLISHER: Hasbro Interactive
DEVELOPER: Wayward Design
CONTACT: www.hasbrointeractive.com/microprose/index.cfm

Details, Details...

Wayward Design has done its homework. Each crew position has been painstakingly detailed, from pilot to tail gunner. Particularly impressive is the bombardier's station, where the Norden bombsight is beautifully rendered. Every position has three views: action, instrument, and window. Take a look at the screenshots for the bombardier, where you can see first the action view, then the instrument view. There's an additional control panel for the bombardier where he opens bomb-bay doors, arms ordinance, and then takes control of the plane to guide it for targeting. Once lined up, the payload is dropped, and the ship races for home.

Wayward is planning on incorporating a very sophisticated damage

SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND The starboard waist gunner opens up on an exposed Me-109.

model, which could make the return trip home a real white-knuckler if you've sustained heavy flak damage or have been torn up by German Me-109s. But you've got help. In addition to being able to man all but one of the B-17G's gun positions – nose, top, belly, left/right waist, and tail – you'll have P-51s as fighter escorts to help see the mission through. Both the Me-109s and P-51s can be piloted by other players in multiplayer games.

Traditionally, the "bomber guys" in the online flight-sim world have been easy targets because they lacked a full compliment of gunners. But because you can have a full crew in B-17, the ship will be better defended, both from its own guns and by its escort fighters.

HAPPINESS IS A WARM P-51 In addition to five gunner stations, you'll have help from P-51 fighter escorts.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS A squadron flying in formation on the way to say "Have a nice day, Adolf."

THIS IS YOUR CAPTAIN SPEAKING The B-17's cockpit is superbly modeled, including controls for prop-pitch, turbo engage/disengage, and even the four engines' magnetos.

Yank and Bank it Ain't

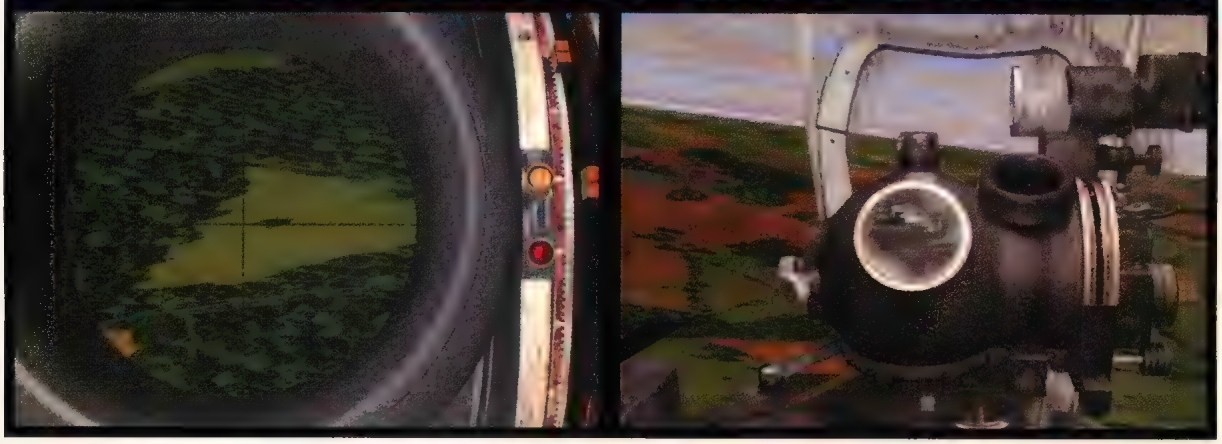
Even with its four mighty 1,200HP power plants, the B-17 takes some finessing to get airborne, especially when carrying a full bomb-load. Once in the air, the ship handles well, but is as sluggish as you'd expect. The early version we played didn't yet have trim controls, and the ship flew nose-heavy, requiring constant back-pressure on the stick to keep it flying level. Flying in action view allowed for realistic visibility, although the only way to see instruments was to switch to instrument view. We figure Wayward will have some better pilot-view system in place in the final version that will at least let you glance at your instruments using the view-hat.

When starting a mission, be sure to use the external camera to watch the 17's four engines initially cough out smoke before coming to life. Taxiing the plane is not an easy task, mainly because the 17 is a tail-dragger that allows the pilot limited ground visibility until the tail lifts near takeoff speeds.

More to Come

The early build we saw didn't have a lot of gameplay enabled yet, but it did allow us to fly around and take a fantastic tour of the 17's ten different crew stations. We'll be getting a beta build within a month, so look for a progress report next issue. FLYING FORTRESS is poised to take Internet-based flight sim co-op multiplayer to a new level of teamwork and strategy, and online squadrons can't wait to get airborne in this one. Neither can we. CGW

SMILE FOR BOMBSIGHT Here you can see the exquisite detail that went into modeling the B-17's Norden bombsight, both in action- and instrument-view.



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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

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BORN LEADER Don't feel like flying into the fray this time? Try commanding your team to victory instead.

SPACE DOGS ALLEGIANCE manages to look pretty when you're in the heat of a dogfight with some other online goober.

Allegiance

The Evil Empire is entering the space race. No, Microsoft isn't buying ads on Mir; they're crafting a new online multiplayer space sim, ALLEGIANCE, to suck up your time, money, and productivity. And they're not just content to snag fighter jocks; ALLEGIANCE has features that will appeal to arm-chair commanders and even finance wizards. If you can shoot, strategize, or balance a checkbook, there's something for you in ALLEGIANCE.

Genre-Mixing Mayhem

While ALLEGIANCE has many features for different types of gamers, the heart of the game is still in the dogfights-in-space style of gameplay. On its simplest level, ALLEGIANCE allows you to climb into a fighter ship and enter furballs with other gamers, all for free (once you buy the initial game). The designers are giving the game a twist of realistic physics – mainly in the implementation of inertia – so moves you can't pull off in the confines of gravity will now be possible. Also, if you're not the fighter type, you can try hopping into the turret of a bomber.

If you cough up the extra dough per month to join the ALLEGIANCE Club, then you get privileges: larger games (I saw servers that were hosting 100-200 player brouhahas), statistics logging, more craft to choose from, membership in one of the game's three factions, and the ability to create your own squadron. While there isn't a plan to have an overarching persistent universe just yet, the design team is thinking of implementing *some* sort of persistence to reward players who sign up. Right now, the plan is to allow gamers to buy the game and be able to just fire up a server or join a random firefight with no extra cost, or to pay a bit more to get more depth.

Microsoft's Got a Game for Pilots, Commanders, and Bankers

by Thierry Nguyen

The Man With the Plan

ALLEGIANCE goes beyond the standard space sim in Conquest mode. Conquest matches involve mining resources and territorial expansion. That's where the real-time strategy comes in; each team elects to have one commander who will oversee strategic tasks such as indentifying which sectors to scout, where to establish mining routes, and who to attack. The commander does all of this via an overhead view-screen; just like a real-time strategy game, it takes just a few clicks to assign orders to other players in the game.

Checkbook-balancers can opt to play the investor; this is the person in charge of directing the technology tree as the budget allows. Every minute, a pilot gets a paycheck with factors such as overall team performance and individual bravado calculated. Usually, this paycheck goes to the investor; he then takes the money pool and decides to either research cloaking technology, or to build more miners or an entire star-base. Individual pilots only need to use money to buy custom load-outs on ships, or to purchase bombers.

They *Can* Hear You Scream

Of course, all of this requires coordination, which in turn requires communication. While the game doesn't yet offer voice-support, the design team has managed to create a rich suite of communication tools. First, there's the standard text chat, for those really complex commands or exotic insults. Then there are the hotkey voice commands, where it takes only a keypress to quickly blurt out "guy on my six" or "target destroyed." Finally, there's command-only communiqués; whenever the commander issues an order, you can either respond "affirmative" or "negative." If you reply affirmatively, then your HUD is updated with information on your order, whether it's to destroy a certain bomber or to rescue an ejected pilot.

ALLEGIANCE
GENRE: Online Space Sim
ANTICIPATED RELEASE: Q1 00
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
CONTACT: www.zone.com/allegiance

As of press time, the game has just entered into an open beta-testing period, so anyone willing to download 50MB, in addition to the frequent patches, can check it out at the Microsoft Gaming Zone, **www.zone.com/allegiance**. CGW

CUP-HOLDERS NOT INCLUDED Depending on how good your investor is, you can either jump into battle with the bare basics, or make a decent custom ship.

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With Monster Sound MX400 You Hear Him Empty His Bladder.
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Screenshot of Slave Zero courtesy of Accolade.
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Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed

Wir fahrend, fahrend, fahrend, auf der Autobahn. By Tom Price

If the Germans do one thing well, it's manufacture automobiles. Nothing against fine bock beers or lederhosen, but quality automotive engineering is Germany's greatest export. And when you talk about fine German sports cars, no name blitzkriegs its way to the tip of the tongue like Porsche. Founded by a guy who helped make other German automakers like Mercedes and VW into household names, the Porsche brand is one of the strongest and most well-known in the automobile industry. That's why EA has acquired the license for their next installment in the NEED FOR SPEED series.

NFS: PORSCHE UNLEASHED is not just an expansion pack or "gold" repackaging, but is in fact the next official installment in the venerable NEED FOR SPEED series. Focusing on just one automaker is a bold new move on Electronic Arts' part, and may turn away some racing fans who expect a broader field of cars to choose from. But gamers shouldn't worry about a dearth of driveable cars in PORSCHE UNLEASHED; over 80 cars from throughout Porsche's 50-year history – from the 1948 356 roadster to the 2000 996 Porsche Turbo – are being included in the game. If you love Porsches or just appreciate automotive excellence, you'll be able to peruse the cars in showcase mode, a perennial feature of the NFS series.

NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED
GENRE: Driving • **RELEASE DATE:** Q2 00
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts, Canada
CONTACT: www.ea.com

PORSCHE UNLEASHED will sport a completely new engine, not just an updated version of the excellent NFS: HIGH STAKES engine. Even though the build that we got our grubby little hands on was quite early and didn't allow us to pump the res beyond 640x480 (don't worry, the final version will support much higher resolutions), the car models and tracks were some of the most beautiful we've ever seen in a racer.

Doors, hoods, and convertible tops can be opened and closed in the car set-up screen to get better peeps into the 3D-rendered interiors. The European-based tracks, which are more in the open-road style than previous NFS titles, are wonderfully depicted and border on the photo-realistic.

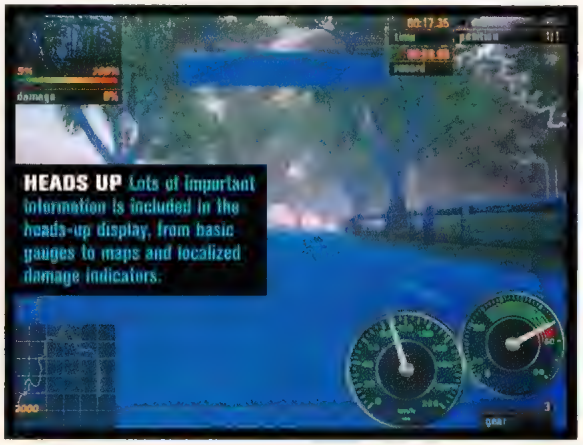
Two new game modes are slated for the final release that should add a lot of sophistication to the franchise. "Unleashed mode" will work as a sort of training mode, rewarding you for doing specific driving tricks (360° turns, and so on) or getting out of hairy, i.e. police-involved, situations. "Evolution mode" is their name for the career mode, which involves a highly-sophisticated economic model that takes market forces into account when determining your car's value throughout the game. You'll buy a car and then upgrade and repair it with money earned by racing. It should be interesting to see how or if these features are integrated into the planned NEED FOR SPEED persistent online universe, MOTOR CITY.

The NEED FOR SPEED series is one of the most renowned and respected franchises in racing games. Porsche is one of the most renowned and respected car makers in the world. Put these two together, and the result looks like a sure-fire hit, guaranteed to fill racing fans with *fahrvergnügen*. CGW

HIT THE SKIDS Small but important graphical elements like dust particles, scenery textures, and skid marks have all been improved to increase the overall sense of realism.

INSIDE OUT To show off the 3D-rendered interiors and engine compartments, doors, hoods, trunks, and even convertible tops can be opened in the car set-up screen.

DRIVING IN A WINTER WONDERLAND This Boxster is screaming through the Alps, just one of the attractive European tracks in the game.



HEADS UP Lots of important information is included in the heads-up display, from basic gauges to maps and localized damage indicators.

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E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Violence
Mild Language

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"Activision has really brought out the big guns on this project." — PC Gamer

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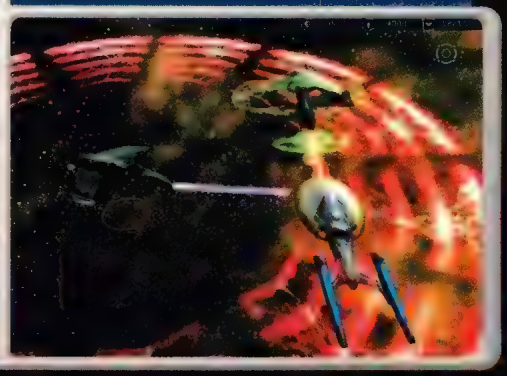

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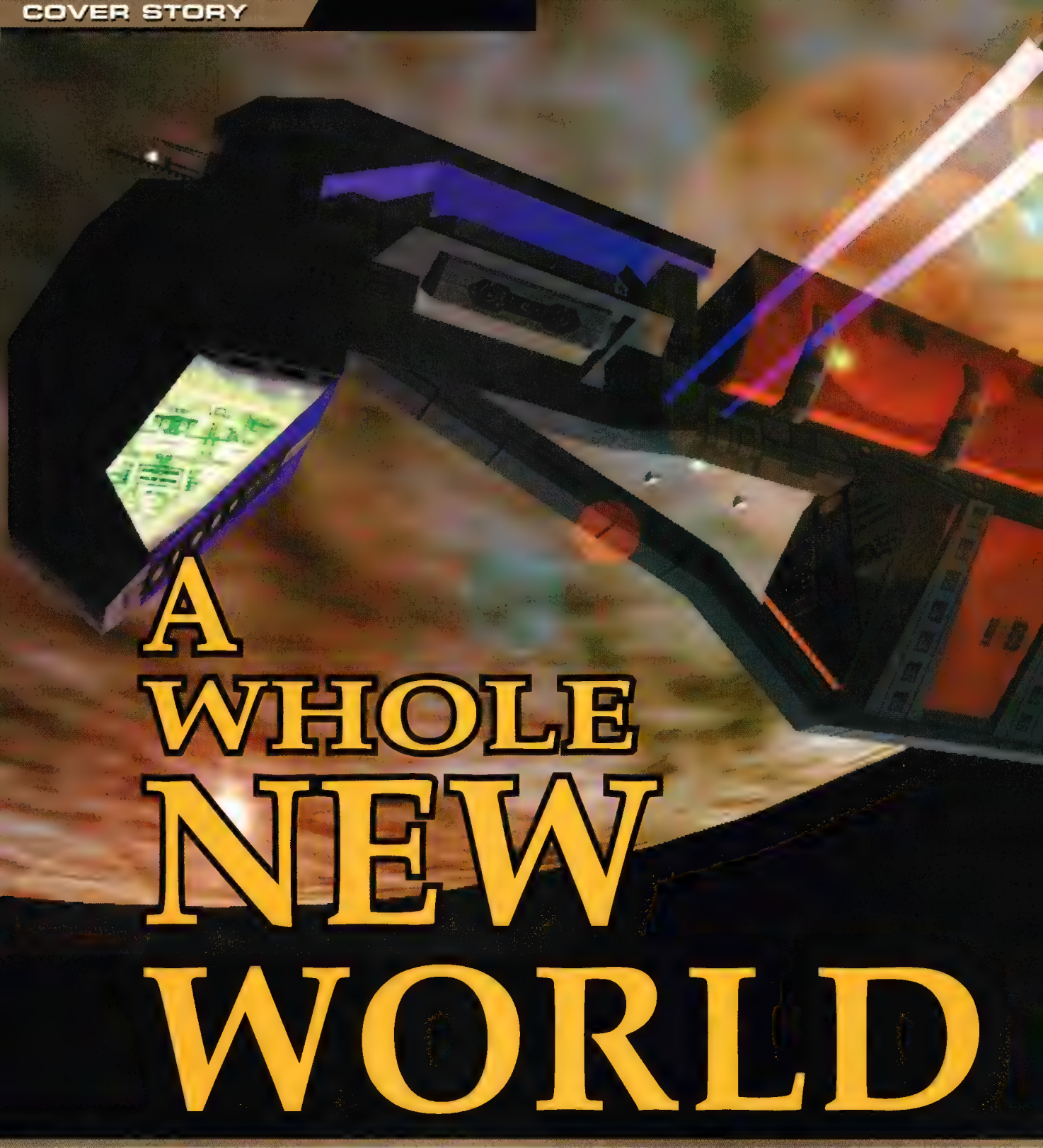

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Deep Space Is About to Get a Whole Lot Deeper

BY ROBERT COFFEY

WORLD: CATACLYSM
GENRE: Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Spring 00
PUBLISHER: Sierra
DEVELOPER: Barking Dog Studios
CONTACT: www.sierra.com

How do you follow up a masterpiece?

How do you match—much less eclipse—the sweeping scope, rich story, stately elegance, and strategic challenges that made HOMEWORLD *CGW*'s 2000 Strategy Game Of The Year?

The answer, if you're Vancouver-based Barking Dog Studios, is not just to knock out a couple of ho-hum new ships, string together a dozen or so uninspired missions, shove it in a box, and watch your bank account swell. No, the answer is to take a risk comparable to the inspired source material, to embrace the vision that was HOMEWORLD and to make it your own.

While HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM is a stand-alone title that doesn't require HOMEWORLD in order to play it, it is perhaps the truest expansion pack yet to any game, definitively expanding the game universe beyond the degree that many fully-fledged sequels are willing to settle for (think C&C: TIBERIAN SUN). CATACLYSM will give gamers an entirely new set of ships, all with new features and upgrades; a new full-length campaign that builds upon the fabulous storytelling of the first game; a tantalizing tangle of new strategic options and obstacles; a more user-friendly interface; and an overall focus on tactical action, rather than on micromanagement.

What you talking 'bout, Willis? What We Said About HOMEWORLD

The word "immersive" is a term that most gaming journalists have expelled from their vocabulary, but there really is no better word to describe HOMEWORLD. Utilizing gorgeous deep-space imagery, dramatic music, and short but informative cut scenes, the designers at Relic created an almost cinematic game around their Battlestar Galactica-inspired space opera.

A real-time strategy game that explodes the ground-bound, top-down, tech-tree conventions of the genre in ways destined to be imitated again and again, HOMEWORLD offers a truly unique gaming experience.

"...(the) best arcade baseball game you can buy – period."
-Computer Games
"Editors' Choice" -EGM
★★★★ 1/2 -EGM
"Editors' Choice" -EGM
"THE BEST BASEBALL GAME EVER."
-PC Gamer
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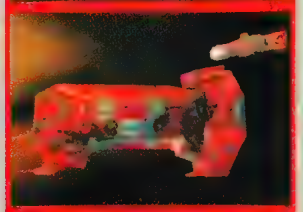
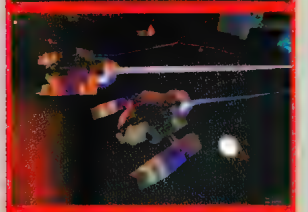
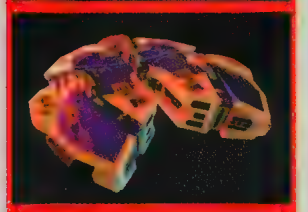
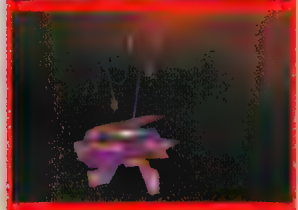
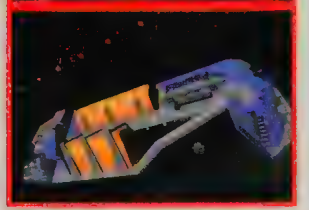
EYE CANDY

THE ART OF CATACLYSM

Life on the Final Frontier

CATACLYSM takes place 15 years after the events of HOMEWORLD. As Hiigara is settled by its prodigal children, the more powerful Kushan families seize control of the rebuilding process. As a result, lesser Kiith turn to the stars to eke out a living, braving the increasingly rapacious pirate clans as well as attacks from Taiidan Imperial Loyalists, as they live their lives as deep-space miners and traders. As the minor Kiith—the Somtaaw—you are called away from a mining expedition to help some Kushan under attack from aliens. Thus begins the game's story as you and your mining vessel, the Kun-Laan, become all that stands between this ancient alien threat and galactic cataclysm.

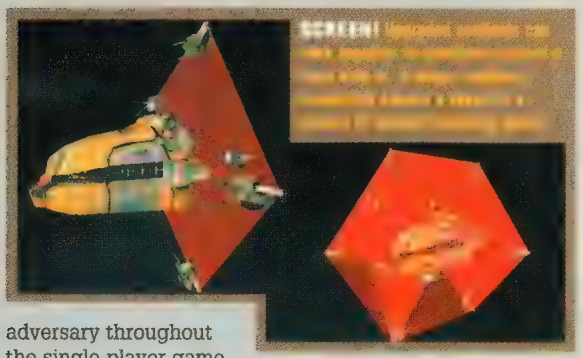
It's a story rich in intrigue, plot twists, and lots of extra vowels. But the plot goes beyond merely offering up an excuse for the action by actually influencing the shape of the strategic game. As the game progresses, the Kun-Laan is transformed from a mining vessel into a surrogate mothership, jettisoning its ore containers in order to build research modules so that it may generate and improve upon a fleet of warships. Deciding which of several research trees (armor, weapons, etc.) to explore is just one of the early strategic decisions you'll be asked to make.

In fact, Barking Dog is designing CATACLYSM so that you'll almost continually be asked to make tough calls. For example, the Worker vessel takes the place of the Harvester, Salvage Corvette, and Repair Corvette. With one vessel dedicated to all three of these vital actions, gamers will have to choose whether to risk salvaging enemy ships at the expense of gathering resources, or vice versa.

Further, the introduction of Support Units will exert influence over the composition of your burgeoning fleet. Essentially a new resource, Support Units represent the command capability of your forces with every ship requiring a certain amount of support in order to be built. You may have all the raw materials in the universe, but if you don't have enough SU's, you'll have to augment your fleet with command vessels in order to grow.

Beastly Burden

As dangerous as the deep recesses of space were in HOMEWORLD, CATACLYSM ups the ante with The Beast, a techno-organic alien lifeform that infects its enemies—think of a less-cuddly version of the Borg. A master of reverse engineering, the Beast climbs the research tree by appropriating technology and ships from its enemies. A terrifying



adversary throughout the single-player game, the Beast should also introduce some very interesting strategies in multiplayer contests, as Somtaaw players may forgo implementing new tech in order to deprive Beast players of the technology.

And what technology there will be. CATACLYSM will feature an entirely new set of ships, and while some will be reminiscent of HOMEWORLD's fleet, their upgrades and secondary abilities make them a fairly drastic departure from the original game.

The Acolyte, an elite fighter, is a force in large wings but is even more effective when combined with another Acolyte to form the ACV, a corvette-class ship that fires a disabling EMP blast. The new Multi-Beam Frigate fires five high-powered beams, making it a cruelly devastating platform against smaller craft, while Hive Frigates release clouds of nasty Swarmer drones. Sentinels are basically stationary defensive units, but when upgraded they can work in groups to create shields, forming a defensive wall to protect the mothership from a meteor field, or even creating an enveloping cocoon that can render a rampaging dreadnought virtually invincible. Even the motherships have weapons this time: The Beast fires an infection beam, while the Somtaaw ship belches forth a shimmering ball of energy that explodes to release a brutal shockwave.

As cool as these ships are, it's the Leeches and Mimics that most grabbed our attention. Mimics project a holographic image of any ship they've seen, and are undetectable to enemy sensors as long as they initially take shape outside of sensor range. Possessed of a devastating, kamikaze-style detonation, imagine a handful of Mimics passing themselves off as Workers towing crystals back to your enemy's mothership

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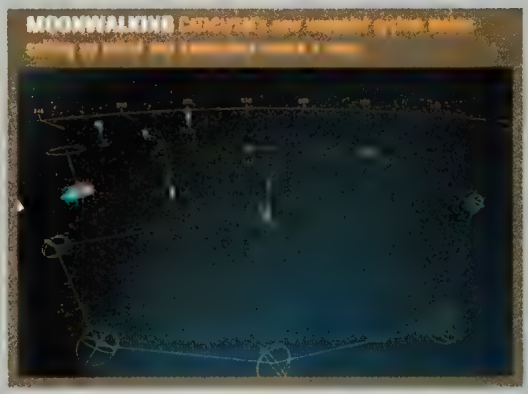
ENCYCLOPEDIA GALACTICA
Among CATACLYSM's many interface enhancements is a one-click info box that'll tell you everything you need to know about any ship in your fleet.
CLASS: FIGHTER
Weapons
RUN 00: SMALL
RUN 01: SMALL
PROJECTILE 1 ■ 0 = 0
PROJECTILE 1 ■ 0 = 0

before exploding the crystals and themselves. If anything, the Leeches are nastier, teeny-tiny little ships you can barely see, detectable only by recon ships and having three attack options: Spy, where they latch onto an enemy and serve as a remora-like probe; Leech, where they siphon-off resources; and Vent, where the Leech slowly drains health from an oblivious enemy who won't notice the health loss until it reaches critical.

Kicking Some Asteroid

If there's any other guiding light to Barking Dog's design philosophy, it's that sitting around is bad and slinging lasers is good. To that end, CATACLYSM will boast a slew of features built specifically to reduce micromanagement and increase the action. Foremost among these is a very welcome time-compression feature, allowing you to speed up the early explore-and-build portions of the missions, as well as that tedious end-of-mission resource harvesting. Fog-of-war has been implemented; known parts of space are represented by wireframe boxes in your Sensor display, with the undiscovered portion of the galaxy shrouded in appropriately inky blackness. With no resources immediately visible, gamers will be forced to explore right off the bat, and—more welcome news—they'll be able to move their mothership along with them this time.

Barking Dog is also trying to make terrain as much a factor in the game as possible—no mean feat, considering the fully-3D gameworld. Meteor showers and asteroid fields will threaten your ships, while slip gates that teleport you to other parts of the map will become vital choke points you'll struggle to control. There's even a new, extremely precious resource in the form of crystals whose energy signature is so strong, it's visible even on unexplored portions of the map. So rich in resources are the crystals, the design team expects that multiplayer games will often become pitched battles over them alone. But crystals aren't a first-class ticket to instant victory: Since they can only be processed by the mothership, your workers will have to risk attack as they tow crystals back to base. Incidentally, crystals explode when shot.



As much as gamers should keep an eye out for HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM, perhaps they should keep an eye on Barking Dog as well. Who would have thought that a team composed of basically unknown guys—guys who'd worked on POWER PIGGS OF THE DARK AGE, JACKIE CHAN'S STUNTMASTER, and the COUNTERSTRIKE mod for HALF-LIFE—would take one of the most original titles of recent years and practically reinvent it? We're hoping that CATACLYSM starts a move away from the uninspired, cookie-cutter expansion/add-on/money-milking part of this industry. CGW

ALL TOGETHER NOW This shot shows a pair of upgraded Assyrian fighters combining to form the more potent, corvette-class ACV unit.

5 THINGS...

Five Ways CATACLYSM Will Improve Commanding Your Forces

1) Orders from your Sensor Manager
Instead of just directing your fleet movements in the Sensor Manager, you'll actually be able to issue attack orders as well – obviating the need to bounce back and forth between screens.

2) Waypoints
A robust waypoint system will allow you to set up exploration and patrol routes.

3) Pop-Up Information for Every Ship
Detailed info about every ship in your fleet is a mouse-click away.

4) Vocal Feedback
Unique voices for every ship type let you know exactly who is reporting they're under fire, without forcing you to scour the map frantically.

5) Complex Order Options
More detailed orders let you easily tell a capital ship to swing around an enemy and attack from behind or beneath, avoiding Star Trek-style face-offs.

The Future of HOMEWORLD

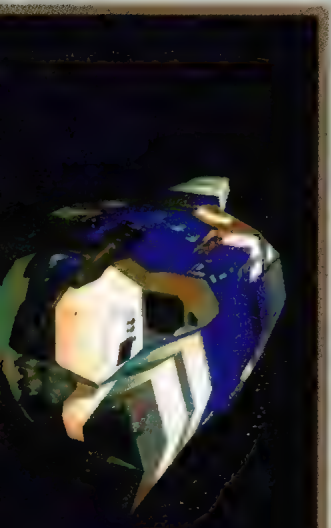
Talk to Relic CEO Alex Garden about a sequel to HOMEWORLD, and he'll very helpfully point out that a sequel hasn't even been announced yet. But you, I, and all of humanity know that fearing some sort of planet-destroying event that forces the inhabitants of Earth to become participants in a real-life HOMEWORLD-style search,

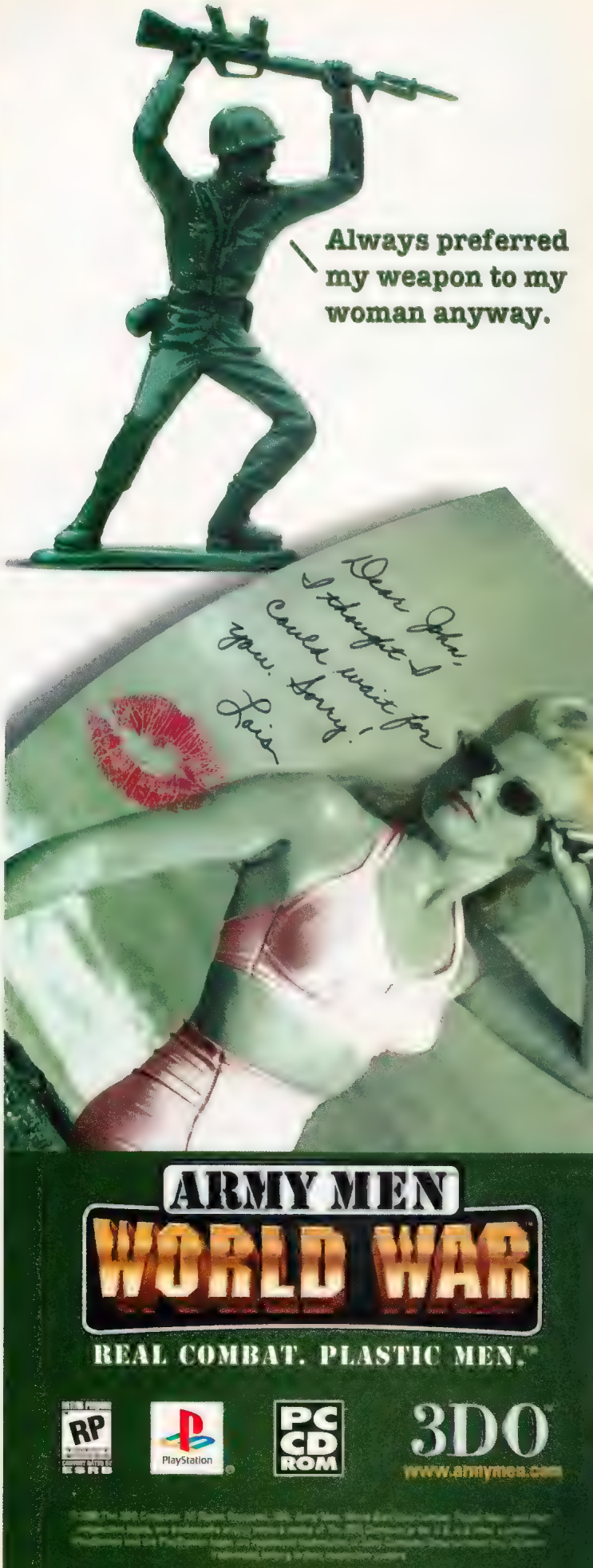
there will be a sequel.

So aside from the obvious HOMEWORLD 2 or HOMEWORLD II connotations, what other tough choices are the designers from Relic grappling with and what decisions have they already made? Sometime we were able to pry some information out of Garden. For one thing, they've again set the bar very high for themselves, striving to make HOMEWORLD 2 be to HOMEWORLD what QUAKE was to WOLFENSTEIN 3D. Happily, some of the initial improvements have already been addressed by Barking Dog, so you can definitely count on Relic employing many of the new interface and gameplay features from CATACLYSM.

While Relic will still keep the focus on big epic space battles, they hope to incorporate new features such as strategic geographic areas and character interactions. What shape the character interaction will take has still not been determined. A key part of the design process is going to be to find a way to incorporate characters in a meaningful, game-enhancing manner.

Short of using the CDW from Mobius, that was about all we could beat out of Garden. We'll have more details as soon as he's recovered.





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PORSCHE UNLEASHED

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In preparation for takeoff, securely fasten your racing harness. You are flying in the Porsche® 911® turbo—capable of launching from 0 to 60 in 4.3 seconds and cruising at speeds in excess of 170 mph. Please remember, smoking the tires through 360s and four-wheel drifts is strictly encouraged. We know you have a choice when it comes to your adrenaline needs—thank you for choosing Need for Speed.

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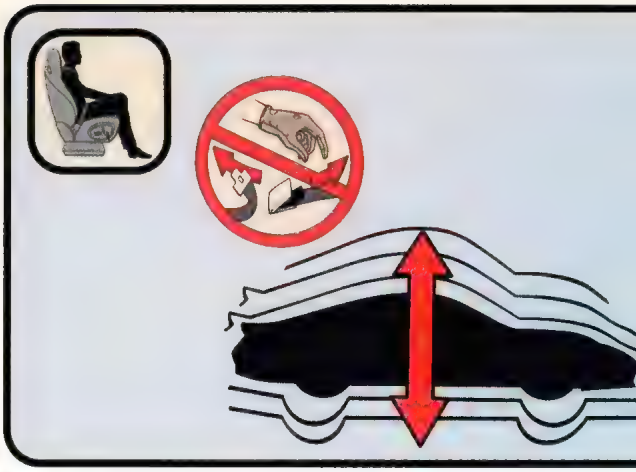
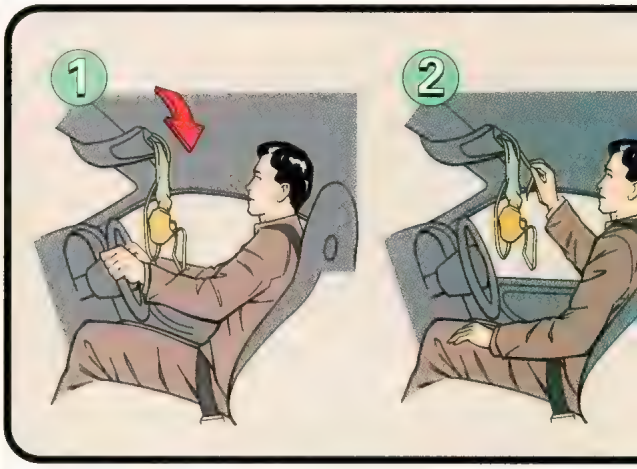
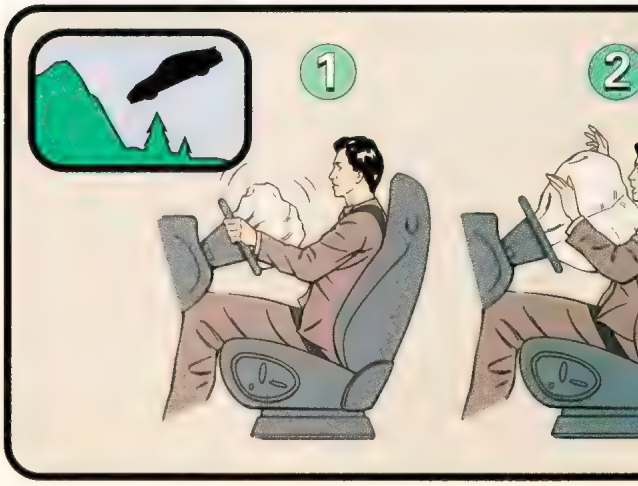
安全のために

離陸時には、必ずシートベルトをしっかりと締めてください。
現在、ポルシェ911ターボで飛行中です。







Also available for Playstation® game console.

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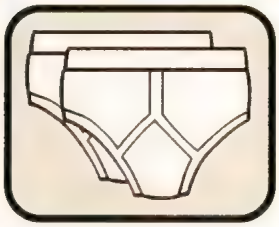
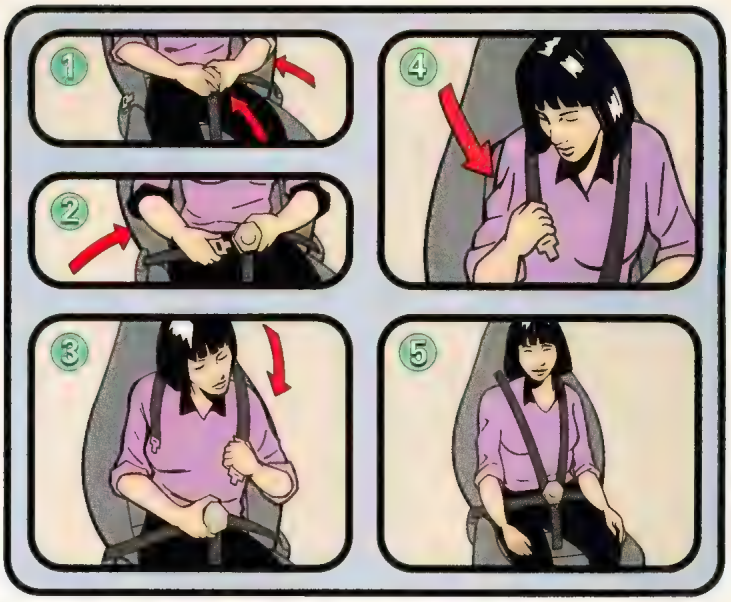
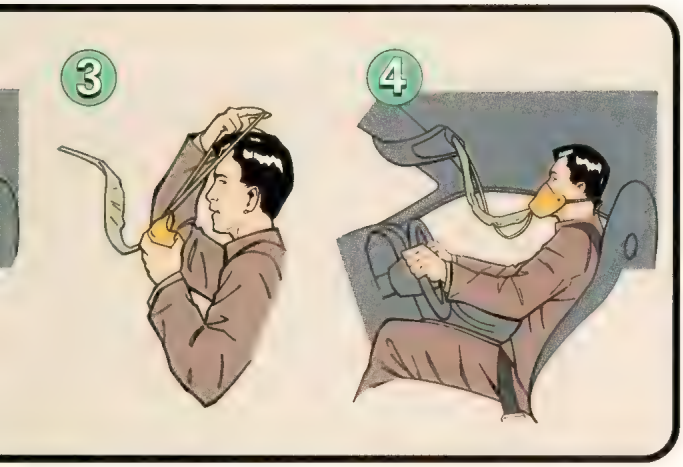
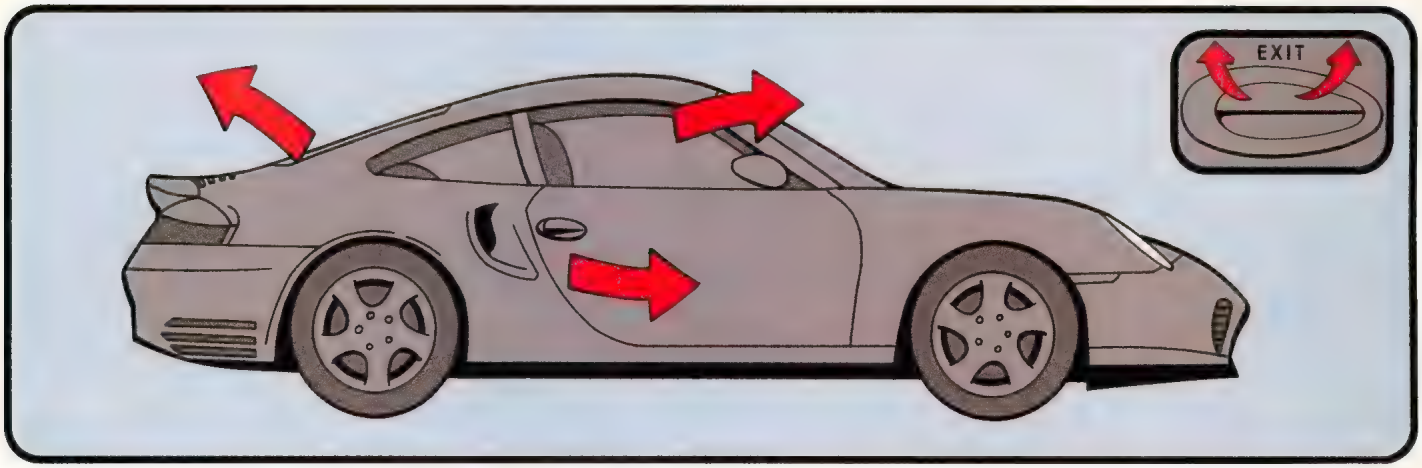
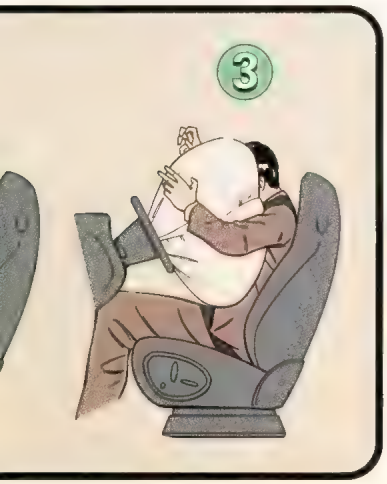


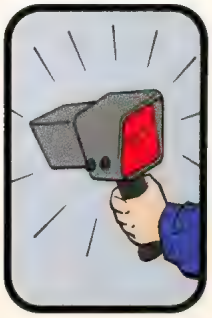






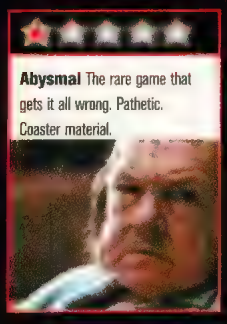


EXIT OPERATION:
OBSERVE SURROUNDINGS. IF SCENERY IS MOVING–REMAIN IN VEHICLE. IF STATIONARY, PROCEED WITH CAUTION TO NEAREST EXIT.



REVIEWS

HOW DO WE RATE?



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

> "BATTLEZONE II is the kind of game that makes you call it names. Sleep Killer. Life Stealer. Irritator of Spouses."
>
> — Greg Fortune, reviewing BATTLEZONE II

Inside the Smoke-Filled Offices of *CGW*

When boxed copies of games like UNREAL TOURNAMENT or BATTLEZONE 2 arrive in the *CGW* offices, a feeding frenzy breaks out, the likes of which hasn't been seen since Dom Deluise and Shelley Winters got kicked out of an all-you-can-eat Sizzler shrimp orgy. But when games like SOUTH PARK RALLY or WILD WILD WEST show up on our doorstep, you'd think they were shrink-wrapped in small-pox ridden blankets. Considering all of the horrible computer games spawned from TV or movie licenses, can you blame us?

But a funny thing happened this time around. SOUTH PARK RALLY turned out to be entertaining, at least to those of us who enjoyed the South Park TV show or last year's hilarious movie. The sick and twisted humor of SP creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone seemed to be fairly fertile ground, but the game adaptations have been consistently disappointing. SOUTH PARK RALLY succeeds in bringing its license to life by being just as demented as the cartoon. We had a blast shooting adult toys at each other and fish-tailing in puke slicks in multiplayer mode. With the movie soundtrack blasting away in the testing lab, we pitted Jesus versus Satan (this time it's personal). The Prince of Peace dropped some explosives right into Beelzebub's path, sending him straight to the 7th ring of Hades. Then, with the help of a Terence & Philip fart-boost, the Son of God took the checkered flag.

We were laughing so hard, we didn't even hear the bus to hell honking its horn in front of our offices. CGW

APRIL REVIEWS

GAME	RATING	PAGE
Battlezone II	★★★★★	69
Crusaders of Might & Magic	★★★★★	90
Descent 3: Mercenary	★★★★★	94
Gabriel Knight 3	★★★★★	74
Hype the Timequest	★★★★★	84
MechWarrior 3 Expansion	★★★★★	94
Mortyr	★★★★★	83
Op Art: Wargame Of Year edition	★★★★½	94
Shanghai Dynasty	★★★★★	92
South Park Rally	★★★★★	94
Test Drive 6	★★★★★	76
Urban Chaos	★★★★★	78
Wild Wild West	★★★★★	86

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

ACTION / STRATEGY

BATTLEZONE II

reviewed by Greg Fortune

BATTLEZONE II Is Just Shy of a Landmark Game

Hovering Near Greatness

BATTLEZONE II is the kind of game that makes you call it names. Sleep Killer. Life Stealer. Irritator of Spouses. It's *that* freaking cool.

BZ2 has improved upon both the engine and the mechanics of BATTLEZONE in several ways, while preserving the challenging mix of real-time strategy and shooter elements that made it *CGW*'s 1999 Action Game Of The Year. You still pilot a weapon-packed hovertank; you still direct the gathering of resources and the building of bases; you still fight bad guys, only this time the enemies are aliens as opposed to communists.

The core gameplay is still great, but BZ2 is by no means perfect. There are some bugs in both the single- and multiplayer games, with the multiplayer aspect getting the short end of that stick. It remains, however, a game well worth checking out for any gamer craving great play.

COLLECT AND TRADE WITH FRIENDS Aliens destroy your vehicle? Help yourself to a new one by sniping an enemy pilot and stealing his ride.

A Big Box of Eye Candy

Visually, BATTLEZONE II is striking. Six gorgeous planets, each with their own unique environment, provide the acreage for the action. Subtle contours with only a hint of pixelated edges glide smoothly across your screen, even on an original TNT accelerator card. If you have a Pentium III, look out; there are additional effects that take advantage of the graphics algorithms built into the Pentium-III chip, and man are they beautiful. Several times I found myself distracted mid-mission by the landscape I was travelling across. Explosions, smoke trails, lakes of fire, falling snow, and pouring rain are all rendered in fabulous detail. The only problem with the graphics engine is a funny clipping problem involving rocks and trees placed on top of the landscape mesh. In many, many places, you can drive your vehicle right through a rock or a tree without even slowing down.

High on the long list of clever new gameplay options is the ability to get out of your vehicle, enter one of your structures, and customize the units that the building creates. There's a lot more outside your vehicle this time around, including a communications bunker

CGW RATED

PROS

Great update to the first outstanding strategy/shooter-style hybrid.

CONS

Heavily-scripted missions and bugs keep it from being a landmark game.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III, 128MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-6 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Pandemic Studios • $50 • www.activision.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone; animated violence.

that gives an eye-in-the-sky view of the battlefield and allows you to position units, coordinate attacks, and call in air strikes.

BATTLEZONE's stellar command and building interface has been modified to include hotkeys for building units, but you may find that combining two groups using the control key and function keys requires two hands at times. The movement interface remains solid – as long as you stick to a mouse and keyboard setup. However, if you like using your joystick you'll probably need a patch. Not that the game is unplayable with a joystick, just that there isn't much of a dead spot in the center, and that makes for some squirrelly piloting. Also, you won't be able to reverse the axis of your joystick without a patch.

By the Book

And that's the first of a few blemishes in BATTLEZONE II. The AI is, well, let's just say that it isn't exactly bot-like. The game tends to repeatedly throw waves of units at you from the same directions. Once you have placed adequate defenses to thwart the incoming attackers, you can work on building your base and expanding your area of control. While enemies tend to stream in like they are on a rail, their scripts do adjust to your actions, and the game will throw curve balls at you from time to time. In general, the mix of units sent against you as well as the number of units you face is pretty challenging, and if you underestimate your opponents, they will quickly overwhelm you.

I had more issues with my squadmates' so-called intelligence. Although they do a good job of attacking a designated target and defending against incoming enemies, tanks and other units have a tendency to rush out to fight, even in a kill zone flanked with turrets and gun towers. Often I would just order my units to the rear of the base and let my defensive emplacements take care of inbound units, reserving my more mobile units for assaults.

RUNNING HOT AND COLD From frigid canyons to lakes of fire, the alien worlds of BATTLEZONE II are a beautiful and varied lot.

Keeping Myself Under Control

I have been assimilated into the next generation of game controls. Rather than opt for the old mouse and keyboard or joystick routine, I used a SpaceOrb 360 and Game Commander, a rather formidable combination.

The Orb gives me precise control over my craft and six buttons to handle weapons, jumping, deploying, and targeting.

Game Commander's voice-recognition technology allows me to select units and buildings, issue orders, and change groupings without taking my hands off the Orb. All I have to do is talk. BATTLEZONE 2 is well suited to Game Commander, as all the menus use short words like "one," "tab," and "eff-one," which take very little processing power.

The Orb does take some getting used to, but not as much as you might think. Hey, any device that helped beat John Romero at his own game can't be bad!

As much as I like this setup, it's worth noting that it has one drawback that might not make it right for you – the SpaceOrb is no longer commercially available. You could check out EBay and see if anyone's selling one, but you can still use Game Commander with whatever other controller you opt for.

www.gamecommander.com

HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT Thanks to this amusing little clipping problem, I can conceal my tank in a rock with no ill effects.

ZONING COMMISSION When placing buildings, a colored overlay shows you where you can and cannot build due to terrain or proximity restrictions.

Units set to "hold" in a particular position often fail to fire on targets that come into range. When you move large squads of assault craft, the lack of formations is painfully evident as your units bunch up and block one another's line of fire.

Finally, as helpful as the funny little service trucks are, their tendency to patrol *in front of* front-line defensive units is both frustrating and costly, as they often become the closest thing for enemy units to attack.

The single-player missions start out pretty tame. You'll probably be able to burn through the first couple scenarios in a few minutes each. Don't get cocky. The missions get very long, very involved, and hard enough that it may take you a few tries before you can hold your own.

Another nice touch is the fact that during the single campaign, you'll get a chance to pilot vehicles from both races. I'm not going to tell you why that is, because it would ruin the plot for those of you who are going to take my advice and play this game. Suffice it to say that both sides are different enough that it won't be a case of more of the same.

Despite the obvious scripting, the missions are challenging and entertaining enough to make you want to play them all the way to the end, though an occasional crash may mar the experience.

ARE THESE YOUR BRIEFS? Your mission briefings are presented with all your mission objectives, a detailed description, audio messages from other characters, and tech data on the planet and key units. Of course, the objectives are subject to change.

HAVE IT YOUR WAY Here, we're customizing the tank configuration to provide a little more punch. All tanks produced after you alter the factory settings will have the new loadout.

Does Not Play Well With Others

The majority of the problems with BATTLEZONE II have to do with the multiplayer game. In fact, the first patch – which is in beta as I write this – addresses only multiplayer and joystick issues. The problems revolve around the decision to have clients pause when a new person joins the game, problems with the messaging functions, and other connection reliability issues.

If you patch the game or play on a LAN, you can enjoy a number of different types of multiplayer games, including deathmatch, capture the flag, strategy, and king of the hill. There is an option for team play, and I found that co-operating with a teammate and delegating duties made for some great battles. Those who will be playing over the Internet will definitely want to get the patch.

Despite its shortcomings, BATTLEZONE II is a great game. Fans of single-player gaming will find a lot to like in the campaign, and multiplayer matches are a blast if you have a local LAN or the patch. My advice to you is this: If you like building bases and blowing things up, be sure to check out BATTLEZONE II. I think you'll be very happy with the results. CGW

"ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR"
- GAMESPOT, WELL-ROUNDED ENTERTAINMENT

"MULTIPLAYER GAME OF THE YEAR"
- C/NET GAMECENTER

"★★★★★ (OUT OF 5)...UNREAL TOURNAMENT HAS HAD US ADDICTED LIKE CRACKHEADS ON PAYDAY"
- COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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- CNN

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"★★★★★ (OUT OF 5)...THIS IS A GAME THAT SHOULD BE CRAMMED INTO STOCKINGS EVERYWHERE"
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"GAME OF THE YEAR"

- COMPUTER GAMING WORLD,
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SHARKY EXTREME, CHUCK ROCK LIVE!

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 a Horror-Fest of Bad Puzzles and Bad Acting

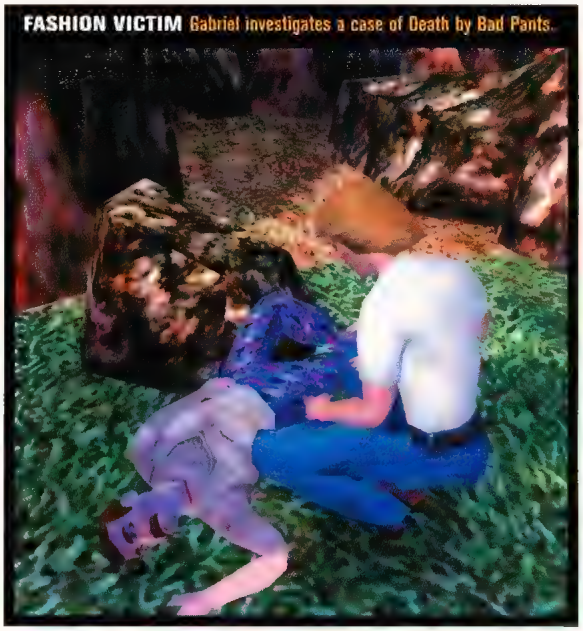
Third Time's a Curse

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 will go down in history as the game in which you have to make a mustache using a spray bottle, a piece of tape, maple syrup, and a cat. There are worse puzzles later on, but this one crops up early enough to discourage all but the most obsessive gamers from seeing the bulk of the game. Couple this with a diffuse story that takes longer than Christmas to get underway, and a lead character with all the charm and appeal of Andrew Dice Clay on a three-day bender, and you have a textbook example of why the adventure-game genre is dying.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 is sliced into "time blocks," each representing several hours. Once you've completed the requirements for that block, the game advances. There are some satisfying puzzles, particularly a series of brainteasers solved on a laptop computer. But most of the challenges are obscure and contrived. Steal hemorrhoid cream to loosen a stuck window. Slog through geometry puzzles, anagrams, and riddles. Charge through the branches of clumsy dialogue trees. Drive a camera around the 3D environment in search of unspecified clues. There's even a jumping puzzle. The whole thing is governed by the kind of inconsistent internal logic that characterizes any bad adventure game. You'll spend a lot of time fumbling in limbo, wandering aimlessly, desperately trying to trigger whatever unknowable act will end the time block. It's as existential and glum as reading stilted translations of Sartre.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3:
BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED
reviewed by Tom Chick

This is one of the reasons for GABRIEL KNIGHT 3's erratic pace, but the structure of the storyline is the main culprit. It's a long time before anything supernatural, much less dramatic, occurs. The first half of the game is excruciatingly slow, with no sense of focus or motivation. After chasing some kidnappers to a small French town, Gabriel leisurely meets a cast of characters on some indeterminate treasure hunt. It's not until the final third of the game that a story starts to gel, tying together a mélange of elements ranging from Freemasons to the Holy Grail to wineries to alchemy to French painters. Although there are some weak links (the vampire angle is forced, and there are a few silly unicorn references), writer Jane Jensen's greatest accomplishment is successfully fitting these pieces into a neat picture by the time it's all said and done.


FASHION VICTIM Gabriel investigates a case of Death by Bad Pants.

Sim Lecher

The world of GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 is built with the 3D engine from Sierra's SWAT 3 game. It's used to good effect to create environments in rural France, adorned with Old World detail and rich color. A lot of the rooms are generously decorated with bitmaps of classical artwork. This somewhat eases the burden of all the backtracking and wandering. If you're going to pass through the same hotel lobby 50 times (this is not an exaggeration), waiting for it to load each time, it damn-well better look good. The character models, however, don't fare very well. They are stiffly animated, with brutal seams between their heads and bodies. They have eerie doll faces and vacant zombie stares. And because of clipping problems, when a character goes to run her fingers through her hair, for instance, she ends up jamming her hand into the side of her head like some sort of freaky alien.

The eponymous Mr. Knight has always been a ladies' man. But as he's written by Ms. Jensen in this third installment, he's a lecherous buffoon. He is not clever, he is not likeable, and he is certainly not smooth. He laughs at his own jokes – even when no one else gets them. In lieu of a sense of humor, he oozes sarcasm and flings insults at anyone within earshot. He does everything short of farting in an elevator full of nuns. His conversations with Mosley, the stereotypical pot-bellied Southern-fried cop, are absolutely painful. Mrs. Jensen either has an extremely low opinion of men or an awful sense of how they actually talk. At one point, a French maid in a short skirt offers to fix lunch for Gabriel. "A sandwich just ain't a sandwich without the white stuff," he leers at her as she fidgets nervously.

Tim Curry doesn't help matters much. The breathy "New Ah'lins" drawl he gives Gabriel is a cross between Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Forrest Gump*. Many of the other

CGW RATED

PROS
Jane Jensen weaves a compelling story from several diverse themes...

CONS
...but she takes her sweet time, litters your path with frustrating obstacles, and teams you up with an incredible boor.

I'M POLYGONAL! Gabriel gets ready for his day job as a character in UNREAL TOURNAMENT.

Requirements: Pentium 166 (with 4MB 3D card) or Pentium 233 (without 3D card), 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266, 2nd-generation 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Sierra On-Line • Developer: Sierra Studios • $40 • www.sierrastudios.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and gore, mature sexual themes, strong language.

JUST ONE QUESTION... Does my mustache smell like pancakes and cat pee?

MEN BEING MEN TOGETHER What's Gabriel doing behind Mosley? You don't even want to know...

voices in GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 are just as awful, but there are some impressive exceptions. Corey Burton as Larry Chester, a reclusive author, manages to embellish long passages of exposition with inflections that convey edginess, anger, or caution. The great Simon Templeman, the dark voice of the vampire Kain in Silicon Knights' LEGACY OF KAIN, is shamefully underused as Gabriel's employer. Well-known actors Rene Auberjonois and John de Lancie are similarly wasted in small roles.

But the game belongs to Charity James as Grace Nakimura, Gabriel's assistant. James brings Grace alive with a tender, vulnerable voice. After a twist that opens the third act, Grace's role in the game changes and James colors her with a gentle and affecting confusion. Her Grace is every bit as likeable as Gabriel is obnoxious. Partly because of this, Grace's portions of the game are a breath of fresh air. It's clear from the writing that Ms. Jensen is closer to Grace than to any of her other characters. It's probably no coincidence that the character model bears a resemblance to Jane Jensen herself.

WHAT WILL HER PARENTS SAY? Grace comes out of the closet.

The Knight Falls

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 is a huge disappointment, especially in light of the impeccable track record of the series. The first game, GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS, was the Adventure Game Of The Year for 1994, with actress Virginia Capers winning the year's female voice-acting award. GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN topped that, with its 1996 Game Of The Year award. The third game was nominated for the Adventure Game Of The Year for 1999, largely on reputation, since the game arrived so late in the year that we didn't have time to play it through until after our nomination deadline. A mistake, as it turns out.

Who would have guessed that Jane Jensen and crew could so botch the puzzle design? Or how bad a performance Tim Curry would turn in? His New Orleans accent has always been off, and his delivery a little too coy for his character, but he's never been *this* God-awful.

Alas, things broke down. The center could not hold. GABRIEL KNIGHT has fallen; let's hope he doesn't take adventure gaming with him. *–Ed.*

Calling Inspector Clouseau

For a story that relies so heavily on characters, there's no substantial character development. Instead, there are abrupt twists in the endgame as hidden identities are revealed. The game's villain is almost completely external to the story, showing up for little more than a cameo appearance. This is a serious tactical error in a parlor drama like GABRIEL KNIGHT 3, which is more Agatha Christie than Anne Rice. The point of the hackneyed "the butler did it!" cliché in murder mysteries is the irony of a murderer who was under your nose the entire time. If GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 were a murder mystery, the killer would be some guy we barely know who lives across town.

Although the game's finale is dopey, the denouement is surprisingly satisfying. And this isn't just because you won't have to play anymore. Jensen ends the story with a shiny new perspective on Grace and Gabriel. If the market gods are willing and there's a fourth installment, we can only hope that Jensen will ease up on the embolism-inducing puzzles and give us GRACE NAKIMURA 4: GRACE DITCHES GABRIEL AND GOES SOLO. CGW

GOON SQUAD Hello, we'll be your supporting cast for this game.

Infogrames Redefines Mediocre With TEST DRIVE 6

Still Not Ready for Prime Time

Like comic/actor Adam Sandler, Infogrames' TEST DRIVE series continues to thrive despite critical scorn and obvious flaws. With a development cycle seemingly a year or more behind its chief rivals – and some of the worst control coding of any action racing game – it nevertheless keeps on motoring along. TEST DRIVE 6 is the latest from the studios of long-time developer Pitbull Syndicate, and it once again relies upon the proven formula of real-life sports cars in highly improbable situations. Is it a *test drive*? Not on your life. This has long been one of PC gaming's premier examples of floating-above-the-ground arcade-ism, and that hasn't changed.

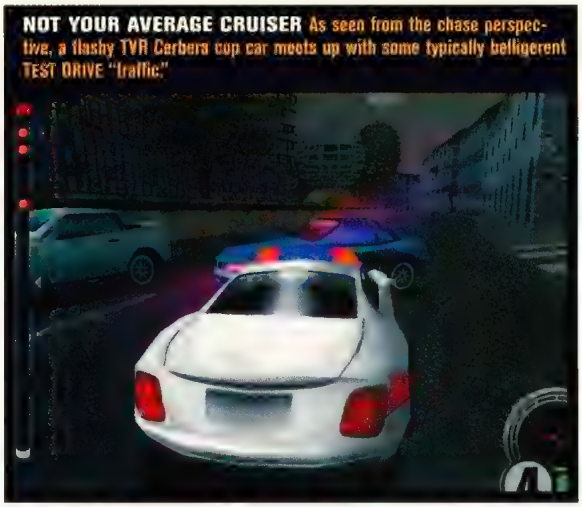
TEST DRIVE 6
reviewed by Gord Goble

Wanna Bet?

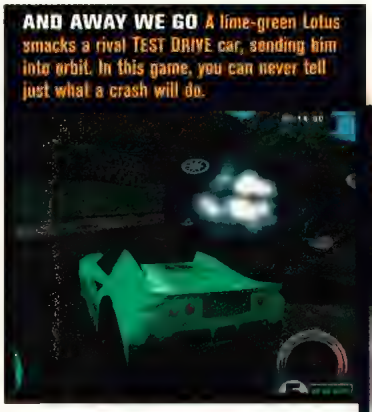
What has changed, thankfully, are the game's ground rules. TEST DRIVE 6 incorporates such welcome innovations as garage and upgrade facilities, prize winnings, and cash management. In Tournament mode, racers are asked to purchase an automobile and then use their on-track skills in conjunction with judicious expenditures and a little garage aptitude in order to advance from the opening ranks of modern Mustangs and throwback Challengers, all the way through to the world's finest high-end cars. Along the way, you'll lay wagers with your computer peers, hopefully winning enough to advance to the next level; but you'll often lose so much, you'll be forced to partake in one-off "Cop Chases" or timed "Challenges" just to re-enter the Tournament.

Continuing in a positive vein, each of the 40-plus vehicles offers a distinctive driving experience. Certainly this isn't an authentic representation of real-world driving, yet the cars do exhibit diversity within an arcade context and react logically to garage modifications and upgraded parts – something that can't be said of all action/racing titles. Sadly, crash results and crash detection are once again horribly inconsistent. Smack another car, even one of the unintelligent non-racing vehicles, and you'll either be propelled dozens of feet into the air or come to a dead stop. Solid roadside objects, on the other hand, may allow you to pass right through. Whatever the case, TEST DRIVE 6 cars usually emerge unscathed from even the most hideous collision, and that's too bad.

One thing is certain: This is yet another TEST DRIVE that seems rushed from the development garage, and in turn suffers from questionable design decisions and insufficient pre-release testing. Why, for instance, didn't Pitbull incorporate all the wonderful user-options referred to in the game manual, each of which looks to address some of the game's more serious problems? If they had, there's no doubt this game would have been far more acceptable.



NOT YOUR AVERAGE CRUISER As seen from the chase perspective, a flashy TVR Cerbera cop car meets up with some typically belligerent TEST DRIVE "traffic."



AND AWAY WE GO A lime-green Lotus smacks a rival TEST DRIVE car, sending him into orbit. In this game, you can never tell just what a crash will do.

HAZY DAYS Obscured by a veil of tire smoke, the lime-green Lotus pulls away from the starting line. Note the map at the bottom left, a great way to monitor your rivals.

I was left asking many of the same questions I had of the last two TEST DRIVES. Where is the multiplayer support? Why can't I switch off that annoying "catch-up" routine? Where are the rear-view mirrors and dashboards? Why does the damn game lock up at the most inopportune times? And why, for the love of God, can't there be a TEST DRIVE game where analog joystick/wheel control doesn't equate with herky-jerky response?

Perhaps more distressingly, the game forces you to exit and re-launch the program whenever you create a new player profile. And because a new profile is necessary any time you seriously screw up your career – something the game's crash-happy computer drivers will force you to do many times over – you'll be stopping and starting more often than Cher's career.

The Song Remains the Same

Of course, TEST DRIVE wouldn't be TEST DRIVE without a ton of hip tunes masking the average gameplay, and version number 6 is no exception. Leading off with Fear Factory's cool remake of Gary Numan's ultra-cool "Cars," TEST DRIVE 6 rocks with vigor. Curiously, each track is associated with but a single song, making things mighty repetitious when you spend a lot of time on one circuit.

Despite some promising new concepts and marginal improvements, TEST DRIVE remains a flawed package. And in a world that includes direct competition such as NEED FOR SPEED, that's not nearly good enough. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
You get to race 40 distinct and varied cars in interesting new modes, set in attractive environments.

CONS
Bad analog control; spinout-inducing AI drivers; no online support; an overall lack of polish.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32 MB RAM, 250 MB hard drive space, 4 MB Direct3D-compatible accelerator card, 4X CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** As above, with a Pentium-II 300MHz and D3D video card with 8 MB RAM. **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** Two-player split screen.

Publisher: Infogrames North America • **Developer:** Pitbull Syndicate • **$40** • **www.td6.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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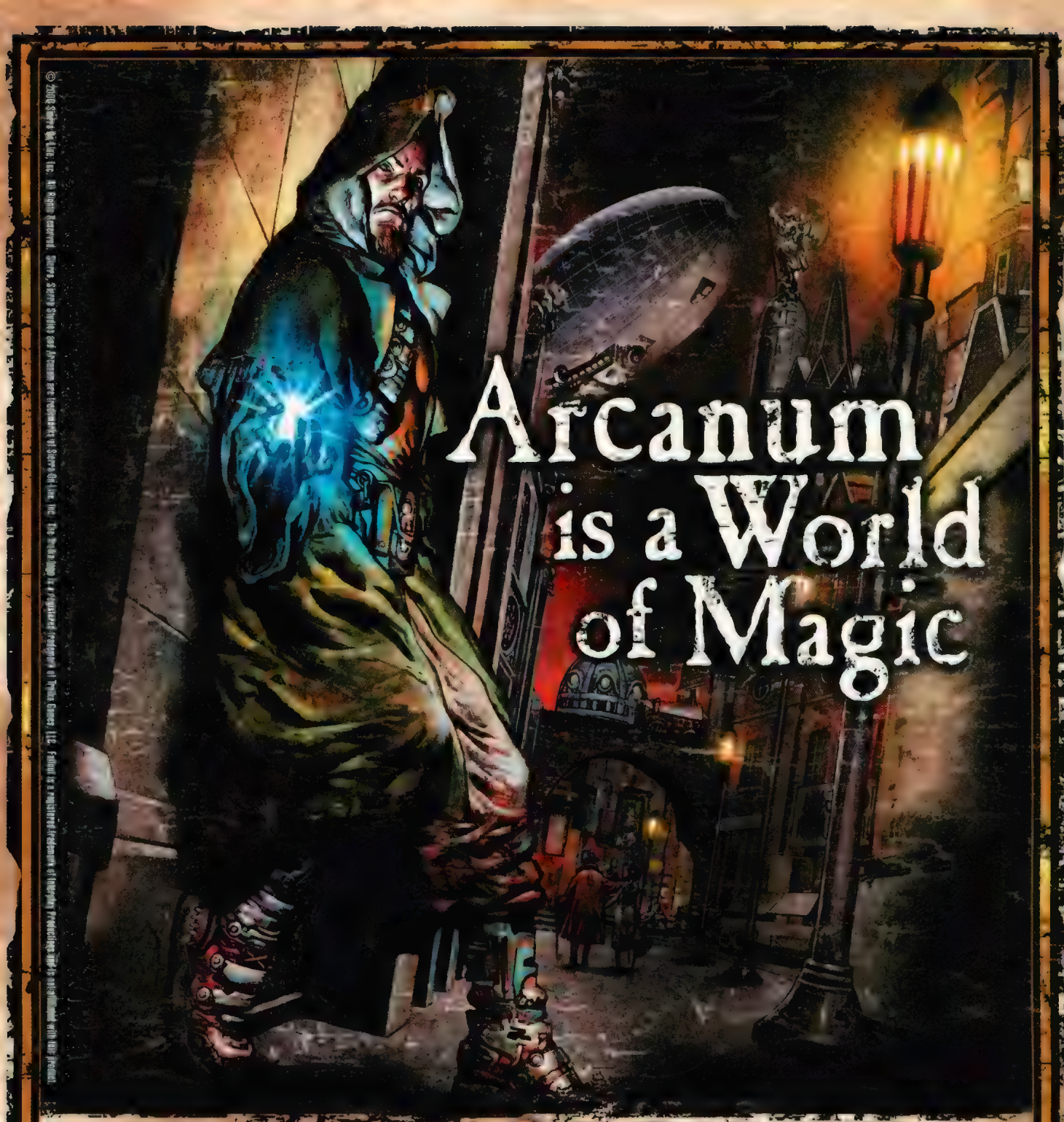

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TROIKA GAMES

Retro Arcade Gaming Revived, With Mixed Results

Cop Raider

URBAN CHAOS

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

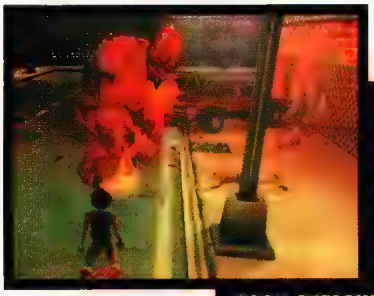
A third-person action game from Eidos starring a female character, what could it be? Not what you'd think. It may look like "Lara's Police Academy," but URBAN CHAOS is actually more of a throwback to games like DOUBLE DRAGON or FINAL FIGHT than another TOMB RAIDER clone. As in those classic arcade-style games, you roam around a city, run into various punks, and teach them some manners with punches, kicks, and the odd baseball bat or pistol. URBAN CHAOS manages to capture that retro-style of gaming and modernize it, with decent results.

In the Year 2000

The "millennial madness" backstory, complete with crazed cultists run amok, immediately roots the game in dated clichés from which the story never escapes. You'll smack thugs around as rookie-cop D'Arci Stern – for once, a fully-clothed female action hero – with the addition of a few missions casting you as Roper, a generic lone-wolf vigilante.

Once you've gotten past all the training missions, you'll be walking the beat, so to speak. Developer Mucky Foot has done a fairly good job of creating a bustling urban environment. The streets are laid out logically and are full of pedestrians and cars.

The game is mission-based, as D'Arci hops around various districts in Union City to complete her crime-busting tasks. Sometimes the objectives are new and interesting (stop a suicidal jumper), while others are more traditional (rescue a kidnapped reporter from terrorist thugs...twice). While there are one or two over-arching goals in each mission, you'll also run into various mini-quests as you roam about – also ranging from mundane (retrieve a stolen car) to the bizarre (arrest a crazed hooker caught sitting on a bench – huh?). These mini-quests usually uncover power-ups that will pump up D'Arci's reflexes or strength.



BIG RED You'd think a giant, red, burning demon from somewhere-like-Hell would inspire more fear, but that business woman over on the right is still just mosey-ing along.

GOOD OL'FASHION BEATDOWN Al cops on foot will help you take down thugs; alas, squad cars always just drive on by, no matter what.

WORKING GIRL You can walk up to any citizen to get nuggets of wisdom like this.

Control of your character's actions is kept on the simplistic side, just like the arcade games of yore. D'Arci can jump, punch, kick, and pick-up/throw objects. Even with these simplistic controls, D'Arci manages to pull off some vicious moves, from a knee to the stomach to a flat-out stomping of a suspect on the ground. Less psychotic players will probably opt to arrest thugs once they're on the ground, and maybe even search them.

All things considered, this is shaping up to be quite an improvement over those old arcade games. Almost, but not quite.

Village Idiots

For one thing, Union City is filled with idiots. The thugs must have been watching too many old kung fu movies, as they politely attack one at a time, even when traveling in packs. What's worse is how regular people on the street are totally oblivious to what's going on. Unless you're pointing a gun at someone, everyone just keeps on walking. No one notices the lone cop fighting the four brain-dead gang members; no one notices the big firefights; no one notices the gigantic demon-from-hell rampaging through the street and smashing cars. It's odd that the city is intended to feel "real," yet fundamental concepts such as "run away from big flaming ape-thing" never cross people's minds.

There are other problems as well, like the fact that most weapons are powerful enough to negate the usefulness of the combat power-ups; the combat system is a bit *too* simplistic (add a couple more punches and kicks to what I named, and that's about it); and the enemies are all so similar that combat quickly becomes repetitive.

Finally, it's time to say the dreaded phrase: "console-style save game system." You can only save at the end of every mission. In its defense, I will say that sticking to the main objectives results in missions lasting only around 15-20 minutes if you know what you're doing, but I know that gamers are going to be annoyed at the inability to save whenever they like.

All in all, people who remember with fondness the side-scrolling, fighting games of yesteryear will probably appreciate the '90s makeover that URBAN CHAOS provides. Small problems like idiot AI, the save-game system, and lack of real depth in combat mar a decent effort. If Mucky Foot could fix the AI and work out some of the other annoyances – while keeping their "living city"– they might make the comic book game we've always wanted. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Detailed environment; varied mission types; combat system is easy to learn.

CONS

Console-style saved games; stupid AI; combat too easy and simplistic.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz with 3D accelerator, Pentium-II 266Mhz without 3D accelerator, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • **Developer:** Mucky Foot • $40 • www.eidosinteractive.com
ESRB Rating: Mature (17+); animated blood and violence, strong language.

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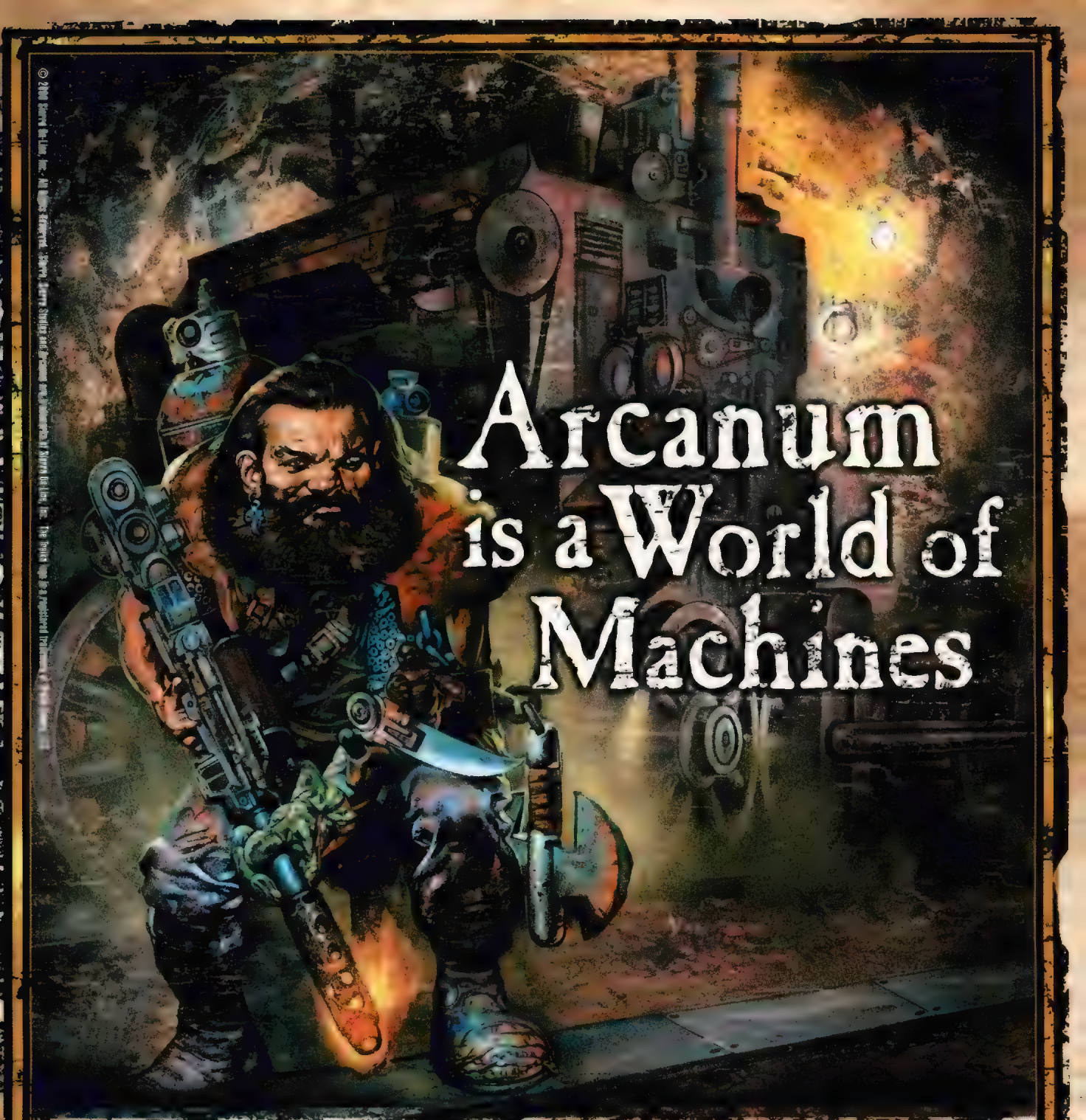

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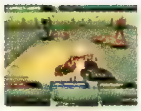
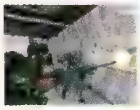


Hired Guns
"A futuristic, first-person 3D shooter set in a slick, neon-washed cyberpunk world."

Amen
"Begin the most dangerous adventure of Bishop Six's life, as he slowly uncovers the horrible truth behind this strange affliction..."

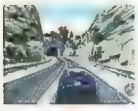


Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms
"If you're ready for the challenge of true team-based online action, you'll find it in Team Fortress™ 2: Brotherhood of Arms."

Invictus: In the Shadow of Olympus
"Fight for more than just your life. Enlist the mightiest heroes in your epic struggle for an eternal seat atop Olympus."

Command & Conquer: Firestorm
"Kane is Dead and a new enemy has emerged. You've played the biggest game of 1999, it's time to experience more."

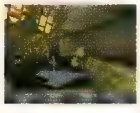
Duke Nukem Forever
"Duke fans, sign on up, this game is amazing."



Test Drive Cycles
"Put on your leather and helmet (where the law requires), and get ready for the ultimate cycle challenge."

Test Drive Le Mans
"The ultimate driving challenge. And if you feel like staying up all night, there's a 24-hour challenge packed in."

Flash Point
"Promises to combine several genres into one—for people who like a mix of intense firefights and brain-challenging tactics."



Quake/Storm
"The Ion Storm debut of John Romero, designer of Quake! An intense first-person shooter with the look of Quake and the feel of Tomb Raider."

B17 Flying Fortress
"The B17 Flying Fortress, alongside the legendary Avro Lancaster, was the ultimate bomber in WWII."

NeX
"Character balance is well-done, what is even better are the spell traps and combinations."

Star Trek Armada
"The Borg have returned! You are in charge of the fleets of the Federation, Klingon, Romulan and Borg ships that will wage this epic battle."

MDK 2
"Visually the game is quite stunning; the lighting and shadow effects are the most impressive features."

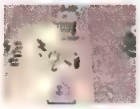
Caesar's Palace 2000
"You become a high-roller and get to "Go Behind the Velvet Ropes" to experience the roller-coaster ride called high stakes gambling."

Majesty
"MajestyTM is a unique sim putting you in the crushed velvet hotseat of your own kingdom.."

Soldier of Fortune
"Plunge into the secret and deadly world of the modern-day gun-for-hire in Soldier of Fortune."

Gun Ship
"This is one of the most immersive games about modern combat in years."

Werewolf: The Apocalypse
"A seamless blend of action, adventure, and role-playing... boasting more thoughtful plots and characters."



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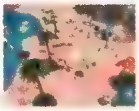
"Explore the world of Diablo II, journey across distant lands, fight new villains, discover new treasures and uncover ancient mysteries."

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force
"Defend the Voyager from assault, and take on the ultimate colonization force—while facing annihilation at every turn."

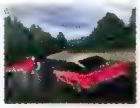
Giants
"Giants is a 3D real-time strategy game that takes place on planet consisting of 30 separate islands."



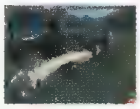
Dark Reign 2
"Dark Reign 2 will introduce new strategic elements, incredible graphics, new RTS enhancements and spectacular multiplayer gameplay."

Vampire: The Masquerade
"Based on the popular tabletop role-playing game, the PC version of Vampire: The Masquerade offers fans of the series a true translation."

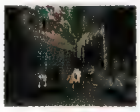
Atari Arcade Hits 1
"Relive the fun and excitement of playing your favorite arcade games of yesteryear, or discover these addictive games for the first time."



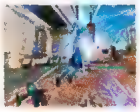
Trans Am Racing '68-72
"Muscle is back . . . the most realistic racing simulation ever created, with the most exciting cars ever produced."



Imperium Galactica II
"Muscle is back . . . the most realistic racing simulation ever created, with the most exciting cars ever produced."



KISS: Psycho Circus
"This upcoming title from Gathering of Developers inspired by the KISS legacy, conceived by the imagination of Todd McFarlane."



Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2
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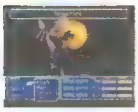
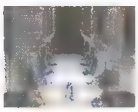
Asheron's Call
"A stunningly beautiful epic role-playing game that draws you and thousands of other players into a dynamic, 3D online world."



Final Fantasy VIII
"Amazing plot and character development; great cinematics; good battle engine."

Half-Life Opposing Force
"Opposing Force has more twists and turns than the lines to see *Phantom Menace* and more horrifying moments than a high school dance."



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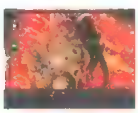
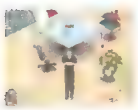


Septerra Core
"Those who enjoyed Final Fantasy VII or Return to Krondor should look out for Septerra Core."

Oni
"Lara Croft may have opened the door for the third-person-perspective action game, but Konoko, Oni's heroine, could lead the charge."



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Interplay's Latest Offering Has a Shaky Foundation

Crumbling Mortyr

MORTYR 2093-1944
reviewed by Joe "Biter" Bailey

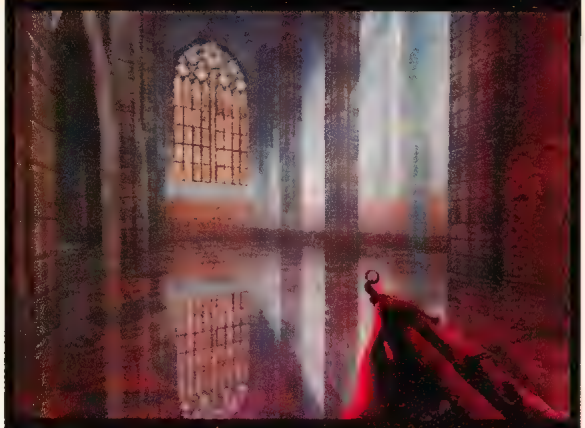
Imagine an alternate world in which the Nazis win World War II by using a time machine to obtain future weapon technology. Now imagine that you are the one tasked with setting history (and the future) straight. No, this isn't the plot for an upcoming Keanu Reeves movie; it's the premise behind MORTYR, the latest first-person shooter from Interplay and Mirage. Unfortunately, what could have been an intriguing addition to the first-person genre is often reduced to nothing more than a standard corridor crawl.

The Sound and the Führer

At the very minimum, a good first-person shooter should have great graphics and a solid storyline. Sadly, MORTYR offers very little that you haven't seen before, and also fails to develop its promising backstory. The proprietary game engine in MORTYR does, however, offer a long list of nice graphic features: weather effects that come through open doors and windows, realistic water splash from bullets, a great sniper zoom, fantastic glass breakage, and the most reflective floors you've ever seen. Still, it doesn't measure up to the visuals of UNREAL TOURNAMENT or other competitors. The engine also has some annoying problems, the biggest of which is a clipping bug that causes you to see through walls when walking next to them. The engine also lacks an in-game lighting control, which is unfortunate, as most of the indoor levels are entirely too dark. There's a bug that causes you to lose all of a gun's ammo when you don't use it for a while. The audio, while generally well done, suffers an occasional artifact when transitioning background sounds, and can drop out completely should you reset your screen resolution during the game. Oh, and did I mention that the install screen comes up every time you insert the CD?

Another essential feature for first-person gaming is multiplayer support, and when it comes to MORTYR, you have to wonder what the heck Mirage was thinking. To play online, you have to know the IP address of the server you want to connect to. As there is no utility for finding a server, you are left to your own devices. At best, that is an unwieldy system; at worst, unworkable. You *can* be a host server, *if* you have at least a dual ISDN line. Nice.

FROM THIS MORTYR has cool reflective surfaces and impressive architecture...



TO THIS But it also has miles of generic, ugly corridors. There's less tunneling under Disneyworld.

GESTAPO-A-GO-GO Colored lights are all well and good, but does anyone think the Nazis would light their facilities like a bad disco?

Hitler or Miss

MORTYR'S level design often seems more intent on showing off the game engine rather than contributing to the mood or flow of the game. Unlike HALF-LIFE, or even QUAKE II – which generally transition logically between levels – MORTYR seems incongruous at times. For example, you'll go from a train station, to a sub pen, to a V2 facility – none of which pertain to your story or mission at all. While the architecture of these levels can be stunning at times, they are just as often filled with endless barren corridors that lead to no logical place. If I have to run through the darn things, at least give me a purpose! And while bizarre colored lighting may be fine for alien worlds and futuristic cityscapes, it detracts from realistic locales and gameplay.

At least the gameplay itself seems well balanced, with enemies, health, and ammo in appropriate amounts. And the Nazi AI, while not great, is decent enough to make sure that you will be challenged. At higher difficulty levels, not only are your enemies incredibly accurate marksmen, they also use evasive moves and will even pick up health and ammo. Because they can be tough to kill, or maybe just because they're Nazis, there is a certain satisfaction to be gained from sending them to meet their maker. While there are many times you will actually enjoy playing MORTYR, these times are not plentiful enough to offset the design and game-engine issues.

Imagine an alternate world where game developers ship bug-free games...where plot and pacing are as important as explosions and architecture...where online play is two mouse-clicks away. Imagine a gamer's paradise. Imagine all you want, but all you'll get from MORTYR is a dose of reality. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
What's so bad about fighting Nazis?

CONS
Having to play this game to do it.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 485MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350MHz, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-16 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Mirage • Price: $45 • www.interplay.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated violence.

HYPE: THE TIME QUEST Aspires to ZELDAness, and Does Okay

Not Zelda, Not Bad

HYPE: THE TIME QUEST is Ubi Soft's attempt to produce a version of LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME for the PC. That's not a cynical interpretation of the company's motives; the game's press kit mentions ZELDA at least as many times as HYPE itself. So let's cut right to the chase: HYPE is no ZELDA. It's not as long, not nearly as deep, and less fun. Of course, these same complaints can be lodged against every game that has tried to mimic ZELDA. If we can try to put ZELDA out of our minds and take HYPE on its own terms, HYPE is a polished and enjoyable 3D action/adventure.

HYPE: THE TIME QUEST
reviewed by Erik Wolpaw

Toy Story

HYPE is based on the Playmobil toy universe – one small portion of it, at least. Those hoping to travel through time to the wildly different eras portrayed in the various Playmobil sets may be disappointed to learn that the entire game takes place in the medieval period. You are Hype, brave knight in the service of King Taskan IV. Flung backward in time by the King's supernatural nemesis, The Black Knight Barnak, you must bop your way back through four successive Taskan dynasties in order to defeat Barnak; save the realm; and be reunited with your betrothed, Princess Vibe.

As expected from a game based on the Playmobil line of toys, HYPE is ostensibly aimed at children. Combat is bloodless, and fallen enemies – rather than being killed – have been knocked unconscious...permanently. But the simple story is engaging and packed with enough surprises to keep older gamers playing. If HYPE's puzzles aren't generally difficult, they're at least cleverly constructed.

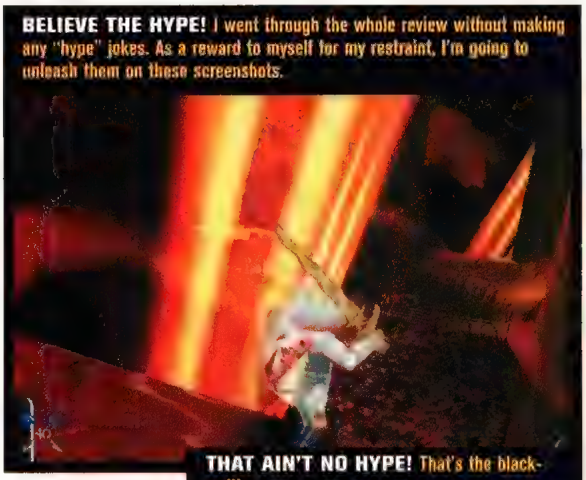
Though HYPE's characters look like the heavily-stylized little dolls that are the game's inspiration, they're well suited to telling a story. Each character's head is a perfect sphere, with two dot eyes and a dot mouth. The eyes and mouth are constantly moving and can express a lot of different emotions. All of the game's dialogue is spoken, and both the writing and voice-acting are top notch. The uncomplicated but emotive faces, combined with high-quality voice work and some really fluid body animation, result in more believable characters than in games featuring models with more complex but less animated faces.

The game's environments are often pretty amazing as well. The shadow effects are among the best I've ever seen. Fires bathe rooms in an eerie red glow, and cause characters to cast elongated shadows on the surrounding stonework. The four eras that Hype must visit take place in the same physical location, but each occurs during a different season and has major architectural and graphical differences.

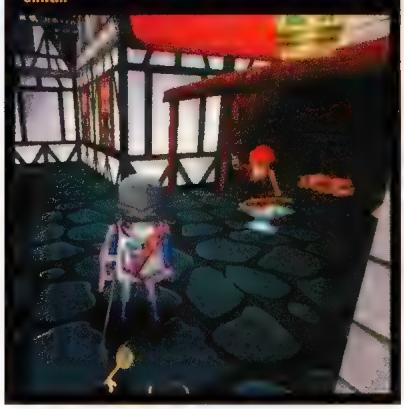
Sim Zelda

HYPE's biggest problem is that it's a little too linear. A few ancillary tasks are included, but none of them are particularly beguiling. You eventually befriend a dragon on whose back you can ride, but, unlike ZELDA's horse, this sequence is more of a mandatory bonus game than a fully-integrated play element. The entire quest takes 15 to 20 hours to complete straight through, and features no compelling reason to return to the game and re-explore it once you've finished. HYPE also features a save-game mechanism sure to annoy PC purists: Progress can only be saved at predetermined and sometimes sadistically-spaced points throughout the game.

These few drawbacks aside, HYPE offers a good story combined with first-rate production values. It's a game suitable for children that's sophisticated enough to attract adults. Think of HYPE as a ZELDA simulation – a fun diversion that captures enough of its inspiration's spirit to be worth playing, but pales in comparison to the real thing. CGW



BELIEVE THE HYPE! I went through the whole review without making any "hype" jokes. As a reward to myself for my restraint, I'm going to unleash them on these screenshots.



THAT AIN'T NO HYPE! That's the blacksmith.

BEAUTIFUL VISTA I ran out of hype jokes on the second screenshot.

CGW RATED

PROS
Excellent graphics; great to play with kids.

CONS
Too linear; poorly-placed save spots.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 120MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 233, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct 3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Ubi Soft • Developer: Ubi Soft • $30 • www.infogrames.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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COMPUSA

It sucks less than the movie.

Tired, Tired West

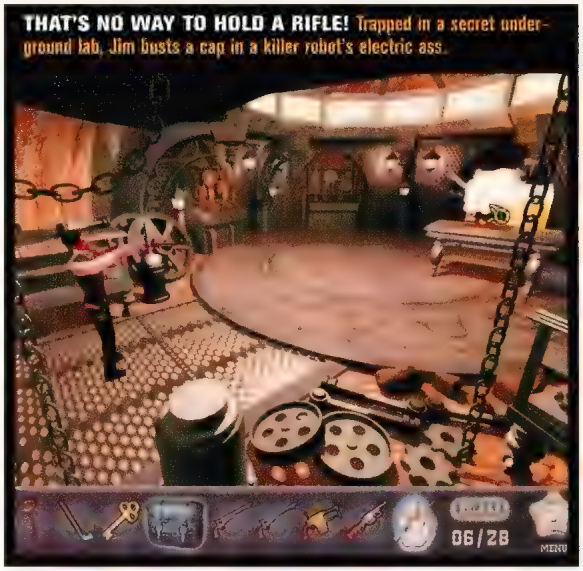
WILD WILD WEST

reviewed by Mark Clarkson

If games based on movies suck, then what can we say about games based on movies that suck? I guess, at least, that our expectations of them should be easy to live up to. And WILD WILD WEST: THE STEEL ASSASSIN does manage to live up to my expectations. Even better, it fails to live down to my expectations. Don't get me wrong; WILD WILD WEST isn't very good, but at least the movie was worse.

WILD WILD WEST is a third-person action/adventure game set in the universe of last year's movie. This time, the fun revolves around a plot by Lincoln's "true" assassin to kill President Grant. Jim West and Artie Gordon move through stationary, pre-rendered backgrounds, seeking clues, dodging bullets, and tossing off glib comments as the nameless henchmen drown or die of assorted blunt traumas and internal injuries. The game's story is substantially deeper than the movie's, which is good, because the game lacks the movie's two redeeming features – to wit, a giant metal spider and Selma Hayek's naked ass.

WILD WILD WEST is comprised of nine episodes, divided equally into the "adventure" episodes you play as Gordon, and the "action" episodes played as West. The final episode alternates between the two.



THAT'S NO WAY TO HOLD A RIFLE! Trapped in a secret underground lab, Jim busts a cap in a killer robot's electric ass.

Even the action scenarios that make up Jim West's half of the game are more cerebral than visceral. But that's OK, because the action segments are the very worst part of the game. The promised "Gun-Slinging Action!" turns out to be various lame shooting-gallery exercises, where you stop dead in your tracks and chase the bad guy around with your cursor. And sometimes the view even changes, enhancing that very special "Duck Hunt" feeling. There are some cool weapons, like the lightning rifle and rapid-fire machine pistol, but you don't need them. You can play the whole game with just your trusty six-shooter, plus a few toys you find lying around.

The puzzles, though better than the action, are still a mixed bag. In fact, the first few – finishing a third-grade crossword puzzle to obtain a metal bird that miraculously completes a totally unrelated Rube Goldberg cork-puller, and helping a weeping waitress decipher a menu implausibly phrased as a brainteaser – were so monumentally lame I despaired of finishing the game without putting a foot through my monitor.

Thankfully, most of the puzzles were a step up from these. Still, expect to play many a tedious session of hunt-the-hotspot, looking for the magic MacGuffin in order to fix the broken device to trade for some essential information. I personally find it hard to believe that Artemus Gordon – creator of the lightning rifle and jet-powered water bike, a man who carries a chemistry set with him everywhere he goes – would be reduced to stumbling over a conveniently-dropped corkscrew before he's even able to open a bottle of wine.

The game's incidentals are OK; the sound and music are nice, and the graphics range from adequate to lovely, if a bit dated. Surprisingly, though, play regularly became chunky on my Pentium-II 266/Voodoo3 system – a machine that plays UNREAL TOURNAMENT smoothly at 1024x768.

Overall, WILD WILD WEST provides some fun, but not too much. If you don't count the time spent searching for tiny hotspots, the game doesn't take very long at all to play through – maybe 15 hours – which is good news for game reviewers, but bad news for actual gamers. CGW

WILD WILD CHESS Although Jim West gets all the action, you'll need your brains to get him through this brobdingnagian chess puzzle. And who could ever tire of chess puzzles?

WHAT? NO ROCKET LAUNCHER? You can choose from a wide assortment of weapons, but don't get excited: It doesn't really make any difference.

CGW RATED

PROS

It's not as bad as the movie.

CONS

But it's still bad.

Requirements: Pentium 255, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II. **3D Support:** Direct3D

Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: Southpeak Interactive • **Developer:** Southpeak Interactive • **$45** • **www.southpeak.com**

ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence, mild language.

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3DO

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Real time strategy had no room for heroics.

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All CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC Lacks Is Gameplay

It Mighta' Been Magic

This probably won't get me a quote on the game box, but I do have one nice thing to say about CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC: It could have sucked worse. For long-time fans of New World Computing's MIGHT AND MAGIC universe, like me, this game had the smell of death on it from the moment it was announced. So consider it a minor victory for 3DO that it's getting more than one star.

To be honest, I was looking forward to this game, if only for the train-wreck factor. Here we have one of the best old-school RPG and turn-based strategy franchises in the business, now selling its soul by jumping on the Lara Croft 3D-action bandwagon. Even worse, New World Computing wasn't even really involved. 3DO (which owns New World) made a TOMB RAIDER wannabe and artificially slapped the M&M label on it. What's to like?

CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC
reviewed by Jeff Green

By the Numbers

You play Drake, a young man in the land of Ardon, your basic fantasy realm where dwarves, ogres, and large-breasted women roam. Drake's family was killed when he was a child by an evil necromancer, cleverly named Necros, and his undead followers, the Legion. Now Drake must join the Crusade to crush Necros and save Ardon. That's a brilliant storyline that must have taken someone a good five minutes to dream up. I guess it never crossed anyone's mind to use any of the plots from the seven RPGs and three strategy games that CRUSADERS shares its name with.

The game uses a TOMB RAIDER-style, 3D engine with an over-the-shoulder camera – and it's not half bad at all. The game runs smoothly on the recommended system (a Pentium 233 MMX). The interface is decent, and the controls are intuitive. I've suffered through way worse 3D engines recently, including the resource-hogging ULTIMA IX.

The combat and spellcasting are surprisingly good. Combat is exclusively hand-to-hand, and though there are only a handful of monster types, I found it to be enjoyable and often quite challenging. Enemies will evade your attacks, attempt to surround or flank you, and will block and counterattack with surprising effectiveness.

I AND I The game is partially redeemed by some cool spells and effects. Here a skeleton gets whacked by our hero and a transparent clone, courtesy of the nifty Spectral Ally spell.

The spellcasting is by far the game's best feature. My favorite is Snap Freeze, which ushers a tiny snowstorm over your victim, freezing him on the spot, where you can bash away until he shatters into crystals of ice. But even old standards like Fireball and Lightning Bolt are rendered with panache – far better, actually, than in the MIGHT AND MAGIC RPGs.

No There There

So what's the problem? Well, to be specific, there's no *game* here. I can't recall the last time I played a game so lacking in things to do – and what there is, is over in about 15 hours. There's only a few environments to explore and they are virtually barren, save for the occasional clump of monsters. You'll spend at least half your time just running between the same areas, over and over. The game ought to ship with a brick to set down on the Run key, so you can keep your hands busy with something more interesting while Drake does his prancing around.

CAN'T TOUCH THIS CRUSADERS' hand-to-hand combat is surprisingly good, with intelligent enemy AI that will evade and block your moves, as shown here.

The game is utterly devoid – and I mean devoid – of puzzles, conversation, and any real decision making. And though they make a show of incorporating RPG elements such as stats and levels, which theoretically would deepen the gameplay, you'll be hard-pressed to notice what difference any of it makes. You can play this entire game without checking your stats once.

Ironically, CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC is really the polar opposite of a New World Computing game. The RPGs and strategy games are triumphs of addictive gameplay over cool technology. This game is all technology and no game.

Before they wreck the franchise further, 3DO should just give this engine back to New World Computing and let those guys come up with a real game. CGW

THE STEPFORD WENCH The game's NPCs, such as this bountiful wench, are almost entirely useless and feature some of the worst, most perfunctory voice acting in memory.

CGW RATED

PROS
Good combat, spells, interface, and engine.

CONS
Someone forgot to add gameplay.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 290MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 233MHz MMX. **3D Support:** Direct3D
Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: 3DO • Developer: 3DO • $40 • www.3do.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

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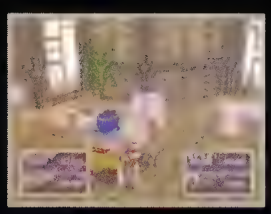
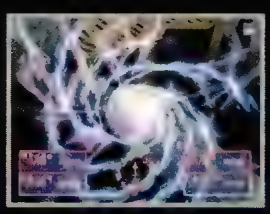
WINDOWS 95/98 CD-ROM





TEEN T

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Sequel Adds Little to Tried and True Mah-Jongg

Shanghaied!

SHANGHAI: SECOND DYNASTY consists of two main games: Shanghai and mah-jongg. Classic Shanghai is a solitary game in which the player tries to remove 144 tiles from the board, one matching pair at a time. This task is made difficult by rules that prevent moving any tile that isn't "free" to either the East or West, or that is beneath another tile. As anyone who's played the game can tell you, this incredibly simple concept is as addictive (but not nearly as fashionable) as black tar heroin.

It's easily the better half of this title. I spent untold hours playing the basic version of the game outlined above, as well as the five variants included. My favorites are Pandamonium, where four players make a mad dash to the finish on one tile layout, and Dynasty, where the players compete on separate layouts to see who can clear their layout first. All of the games can be played online against human opponents, though cunning computer players are also available.

SHANGHAI: SECOND DYNASTY

reviewed by Brett Todd

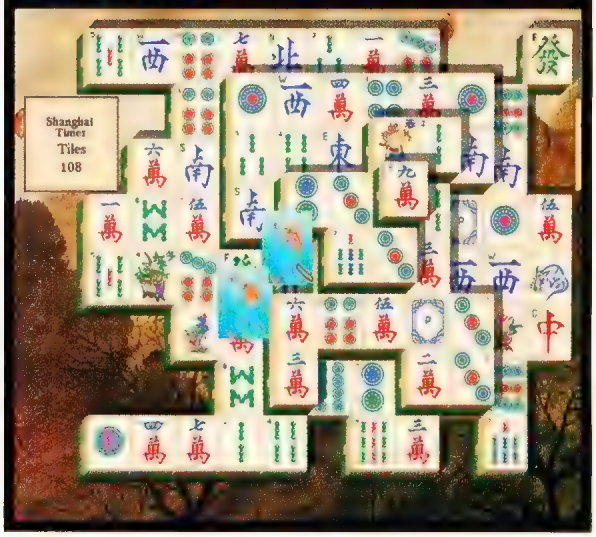
Miles of Tiles

The tiles themselves contribute to the fun. Activision has included 19 different tile sets for use with Shanghai, from the standard mix of Chinese characters through such disparate themes as Fantasy, Monster, Egyptian, and more. While the game does not include an actual tile editor, the adventurous can design their own tile sets using a paint program and instructions provided.

Mah-Jongg, which lends its distinctive Asian tile sets to Shanghai, is much more complex. It's far beyond the scope of this review to explain the game itself, so if you're not familiar with it, just think of it as an Eastern-flavored Bridge or Rummy played with tiles instead of cards. The game is present here in American, Chinese, Japanese, and Western variations. Each can be played online, with friends on the same computer, or alone against as many as three AI opponents. These computer players are generally excellent, and should give even the best mah-jongg player a run for his money when the game is cranked up to High.

Unfortunately, the game itself is pretty much devoid of frills. Having so much good stuff under the hood is a great asset, but having to access all of it with a bland interface of subdued greens and blues almost put me to sleep. The overall layout and buttons remind me of DOS card games from the early '90s that *almost* got Windows right. It was often tough to remember that this wasn't one of the many freeware or shareware mah-jongg titles that can be found all over the Web.

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND SHANGHAI: SECOND DYNASTY incorporates some interesting twists on the standard game. Windstorm allows players access to both North-South and East-West tiles, depending on how the ever-changing wind is blowing.



Makes a Hard Man Humble

Another major problem on the mah-jongg side of the ledger is the lack of an in-game tutorial introducing the novice to its many intricacies. The informative manual helps, but not enough. And even the most experienced players might have problems at first, since the game is packed with many options and gameplay modes. It's hard to fault the designers for being too complete, but I've got to take away a few brownie points for not fully explaining everything that's available.

SHANGHAI: SECOND DYNASTY is sort of a strange game to evaluate. While it would seem to be the ultimate collection for aficionados, it doesn't add much to the core experience offered by its predecessor. While it appears to be the perfect title for the Shanghai/mah-jongg newbie, it lacks teaching modes to get newcomers up to speed quickly on the latter. These two audience-limiting factors, combined with the rather high sticker price and the ready availability of freeware tile-matching and mah-jongg titles on the Web, render the game rather mediocre to my eyes, despite the absence of glaring flaws. CGW

CGW RATED

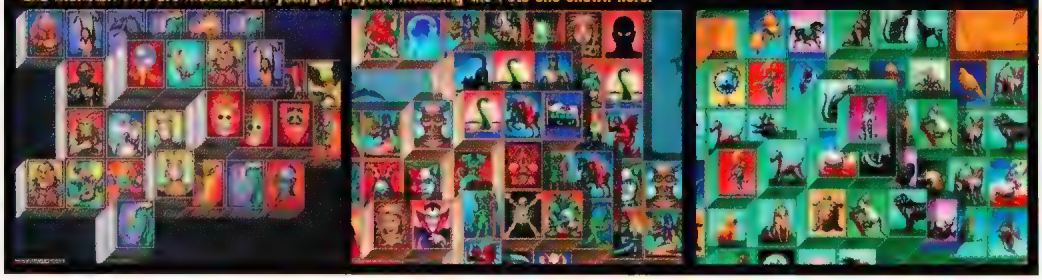
PROS

Think CHESSMASTER by way of, uh, Shanghai.

CONS

Doesn't add a whole lot to the basic mah-jongg experience, considering the hefty price tag.

SET 'EM UP A number of tile sets are included to jazz things up. Adults can play with 14 different sets, including my faves, Fantasy and Monster. Five are included for younger players, including the Pets one shown here.



Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, Windows-compatible sound and video cards, 115MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** None

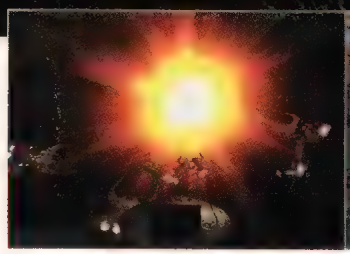
Multiplayer Support: From 2 to 5 players via dedicated Internet servers.

Publisher: Activision • **Developer:** Quicksilver Software, Inc. • $45 • www.activision.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

2000

IMPERIUM GALACTICA II
ALLIANCES

imperiumgalactica.com



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PC CD ROM

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Animated Violence

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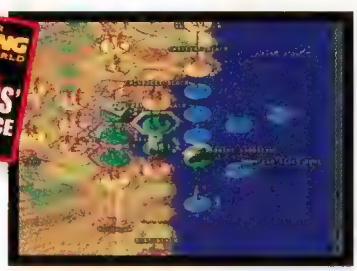
QUICK HITS

THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR: WARGAME OF THE YEAR



The OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR, Vol. I (TOAW I), has undergone nine major and minor patches since its release in 1998. Designer Norm Koger has tweaked scenarios, combat logic, supply, movement, AI, and the editor, but did not implement the largest patch – the engine of TOAW II. The engine has now been incorported into what TalonSoft unblushingly calls the Wargame Of The Year edition.

★★★★½

The most noticeable change in this version is TOAW II's combat system, which models every shot from every weapon, instead of the old add-and-average concept. Hopefully, this feature will end the "100 Jeeps vs. a Tiger" debate. Armor seems to have more breakthrough power, while electronic warfare plays a larger role in later scenarios. The unit database has been expanded and revised extensively and includes many new weapon systems.

Many scenarios from TOAW and BATTLE PACK I have been reworked, and there are new ones as well, including Africa 1942, Cherbourg 44, Overlord 44, Malta 44, and Nomonhan 39. User-made scenarios created with Ver 1.07 translate seamlessly.

If you're happy with the original game, you can stick with it, but this update is very comprehensive and is definitely worth your money.–*James Cobb*

Genre: Wargame • **Publisher:** TalonSoft • **Developer:** Norm Koger
$49.95 • www.talonsoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

SOUTH PARK RALLY

Genre: Racing • **Publisher:** Acclaim • **Developer:** Tantalus • $20 • www.acclaim-nation.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature

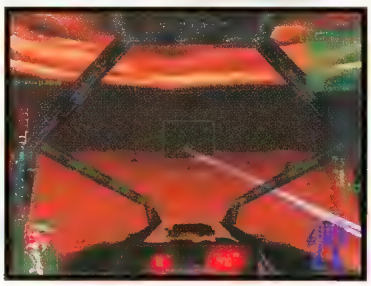
I had all of my Eric Cartman insults – *this sucks ass* and *screw you guys, I'm going home* – ready to unload on SOUTH PARK RALLY before the game even crossed my desk, largely due to the low expectations previous Acclaim *South Park* titles have instilled in me. But once I started playing, other Cartman quotes like *sweet* and *kick ass* came to mind. Damn me to be Saddam Hussein's bitch in hell for saying this, but SOUTH PARK RALLY is actually a lot of fun.

★★★½

People who've never been fans of the show will find very little entertainment in this RE*VOLT-esque arcade racer that lets you shoot chocolate salty balls and giant homing dildos at opponents while picking up fart-boost power-ups. But if you've ever laughed at Stan puking on Wendy, Mr. Hankey kissing Kyle's face (leaving behind little skid marks), or Jesus kicking Santa Claus's ass, then this game is for you. –*Tom Price*

MECHWARRIOR 3: PIRATE'S MOON

Genre: Sci-Fi Simulation • **Publisher:** Microprose • $30 • www.mechwarrior3.com **ESRB Rating:** Teen



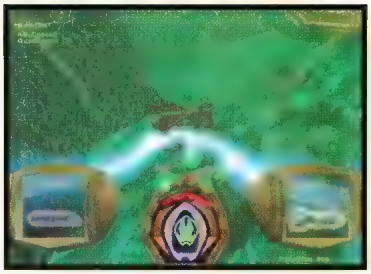
The PIRATE'S MOON expansion pack for MECH 3 adds some new elements to the game while remaining faithful to the original product. That, my friends, is not necessarily a good thing.

The good news is that the game's engine really rocks with the new maps. Of course it *should*, since the original game was pretty exciting visually. The new mechs and weapons are nice, but they don't alter the gameplay any more than downloading new cars would change a racing game.

★★★☆☆

The bad news is that the AI still stands for Accentuated Incompetence. This time, however, the enemy is usually either rushing you or attacking something that you have to defend, so you won't have the luxury of hanging back and picking them apart all the time. Never the less, you'll still find the enemy 'mechs running their little routes in the middle of combat. It's the only excuse I can see for an enemy turning its back armor to you, walking a short distance away, then turning back to engage you – all while under fire.

If you loved MECHWARRIOR 3, you'll probably like this expansion as well. If you agreed with my review of MECH 3 (3 stars), however, you've probably got better uses for your time. –*Greg Fortune*



DESCENT 3: MERCENARY

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** Interplay • **Developer:** Outrage Entertainment
$25 • www.interplay.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence

It's a given that a mission pack either adds some serious play value to a game or ends up being a disappointment. File DESCENT 3: MERCENARY under "disappointment."

There's not much to get excited about in MERCENARY's four new multiplayer levels and seven single-player levels. Out of this skimpy package only two levels stand out: a single-player map where you destroy a hive of aliens and their queen, and a Jules Verne-inspired multiplayer level with a volcanic island, hot air balloon, and an appropriately styled ship.

★★

Even though the DESCENT 3 engine has proven itself capable of some gorgeous outdoor scenery, almost none of that ability is employed in this expansion pack. It's a big letdown to spend most of the game fighting inside a seemingly endless network of tunnels. It left me feeling claustrophobic and ready to flee back to the glorious outdoor mayhem of TRIBES.

One of the most annoying things about this mission pack is that there aren't any new weapons and there's just one new ship (and an unremarkable ship at that). The lack of anything new really puts the whammy on the fun factor.

If you're a DESCENT 3 fanatic and you just can't get enough, then this might be for you; if not, then save your money and hope there's a DESCENT 4. –*Jim Lynch*

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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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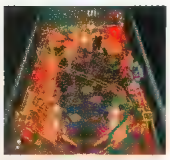
REVIEW RECAP

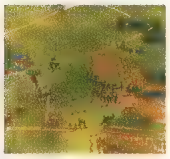
A GUIDE TO RECENT RANTS AND RAVES

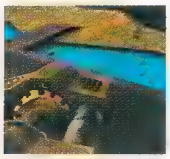
Editor's Choice Games — Highly Recommended!

Game/Publisher	Rating	Issue	The Skinny
FIFA 2000 (Electronic Arts)	4.5	187	Long live the king of soccer sims.
Flight Unlimited 3 (Electronic Arts)	4.5	187	Civilian aviation sim with gorgeous graphics and realistic flight environments.
Freespace 2 (Interplay)	4.5	186	The best traditional space sim out there.
Front Office Football 2 (Electronic Arts)	4.5	186	Play GM of your own NFL franchise.
Homeworld (Sierra)	4.5	186	Richly atmospheric space-strategy game that spins a great tale.
Independence War Deluxe (Infogrames)	5	185	Spiffed-up version of spiffy European space shooter.
Jane's F/A-18 (Electronic Arts)	4.5	188	Well-rounded jet sim for both newbie and nutcase.
Jane's USAF (Electronic Arts)	4.5	187	A wide variety of aircraft await the novice to intermediate pilot.
MiG Alley (Empire Interactive)	4.5	187	This Korean War-era jet sim flew away with our Sim Of The Year award.
NBA Live 2000 (Electronic Arts)	5	187	Distilled essence of the NBA with powerful funk soundtrack.
Planescape: Torment (Interplay)	5	188	Deep, sophisticated, unconventional role-playing. Our RPG Of The Year.
Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey (Empire Interactive)	4.5	188	So addictive it should be regulated by the FDA.
Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear (Red Storm Entertainment)	4.5	185	The thinking-gamer's first-person shooter.
Sid Meier's Antietam! (Firaxis)	4.5	187	The Civil War! as directed by the master! of strategy! gaming!
Sim Theme Park (Electronic Arts)	4.5	187	Colorful software sandbox with that distinct Bullfrog flair.
Thief Gold (Eidos)	4.5	186	Buffed-up version of cool sneaky shooter.
Unreal Tournament (GT Interactive)	5	187	Game Of The Year. 'Nuf said.

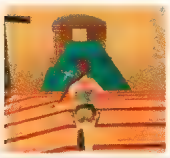
Planescape: Torment

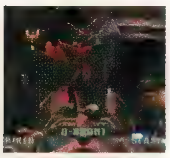

Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey


Sid Meier's Antietam!


Unreal Tournament

Jane's F/A-18


Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation


Quake III Arena

Other Reviews of Note

Game/Publisher	Rating	Issue	The Skinny
Age of Wonders (G.O.D.)	4	187	Terrific turn-based strategy game, especially now that its early bugs are fixed.
Half-Life: Opposing Force (Sierra)	3	187	We just weren't impressed with this short, ho-hum follow-up to a game of the year.
Interstate '82 (Activision)	2	187	A shining example of how to screw up a great idea.
Panzer General 3D Assault (SSI)	3.5	186	The third-dimension adds very little to this classic war-gaming system.
Prince of Persia 3D (Red Orb Entertainment)	3.5	185	The sparkle is fading from this action-gaming jewel.
Quake III Arena (id Software)	3.5	188	Doesn't hold a candle to Unreal Tournament.
SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle (Sierra On-Line)	4	188	True-to-life recreation of SWAT team tactics.
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation (Eidos)	4	188	We really wanted to hate it. We couldn't. The best game in the series.
Ultima IX: Ascension (Origin Systems)	2.5	187	Could've been great, but buggy as hell.

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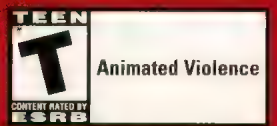

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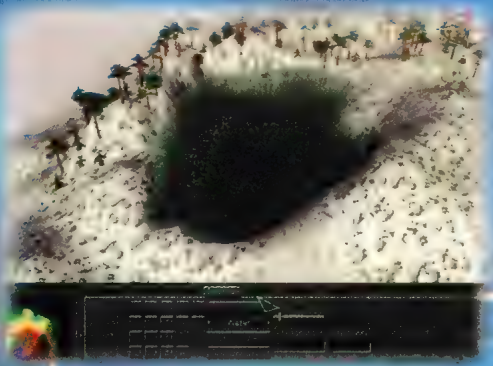

>Easily build your own 3D world with an intuitive map editor.

>Keep track of up to 3 different locations simultaneously with the unique monitoring system.

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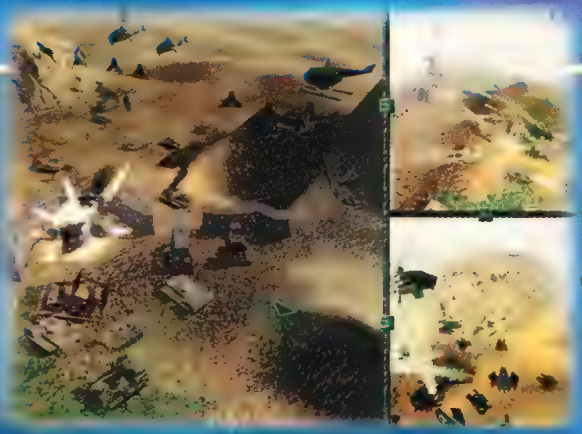

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DELL DIMENSION XPS800

Manufacturer: Dell • Price: $3,650
Contact: www.dell.com

APPEAL
An off-the-shelf system that screams on games and doesn't increase the national debt.

PROS
Very speedy; good component choice; well mannered.

CONS
Graphics drivers need updating; no tweaking allowed; long lead-time.

by Loyd Case

When I first booted the Dell Dimension XPS800, I noticed that it had 64MB – on the graphics card. That got my attention. Then the speakers fired up when it booted. That really got my attention, because these are THX-certified Altec-Lansing ADA-885s.

The 64MB graphics card uses Nvidia's GeForce 256 chip, and has 64MB of DDR SDRAM. It posted the highest 3D GameGauge score ever seen in an off-the-shelf system: a shade over 62. Actual gameplay is quite smooth, too – no texture thrashing with 64MB of local video memory. UNREAL TOURNAMENT ran like a dream.

The impressive performance is due to the combination of an 800MHz Intel Pentium-III (Coppermine) CPU, with 256KB of embedded level 2 (L2) cache. The L2 cache runs at a full 800MHz, is 256 bits wide, and is 8-way set-associative. What that actually means is that it moves data in and out of the cache very, very fast. Toss in 128MB of PC800 RDRAM, and you have a screaming gaming rig.

★★★★★

The other components are top-notch, too. A 20.5GB Maxtor 6800 hard drive handles mass storage, and is backed up by a Hitachi 8x DVD-ROM drive and a Sony CD-RW unit. Our particular Dell came with a 3Com PCI hardware modem to connect to the Net – much better than the usual "soft" modem. Handling the display chores for the 64MB GeForce 256 card is a Dell P991 19" naturally-flat aperture grill tube. I've never seen PANZER ELITE look so good.

A Cinemaster hardware DVD decoder is included, and is unique in that no passthrough cable is required. DVD image quality is very good, although the controls are sparse and the Windows title bar is omnipresent. There's also a Sound Blaster Live Value Edition to handle the audio chores. You hear the audio through the ADA-885's, which sound stunning. They don't get quite as loud as the Klipsch Promedias, but they do get pretty damn loud and they keep it clean. Plus, they do active Dolby Digital decoding and they come with a remote control.

photo by Hayden Houser

While all the performance numbers are generally stellar, I have several concerns about the XPS800. The first is the power supply, which is only 200 watts. But it does seem to deliver a very steady current load; even running intensive 3D games on the GeForce didn't make the system burp at all. The second issue is Dell's tendency to ship systems with older drivers. I had some problems with the drivers for the GeForce, but an updated driver fixed all the problems. The third issue is availability. RDRAM and high-speed Intel CPUs are in high demand and tight supply. As of this review, Dell is quoting a 30-day lead-time.

These are all fairly minor quibbles. Overall, the XPS800 has been rock-solid. And while the box is still beige, underneath the bland exterior lies a true gaming warrior. CGW

	CGW Power Rig	Dell Dimension XPS800
3D GameGauge Score	**61.5 fps**	**63.4 fps**
QUAKE 3 Demo (1600x1200x32)	13.5 fps	13.9 fps
RE*VOLT (1600x1200x32, 24-bit textures)	41.2 fps	42.6 fps
Content Creation WinStone (1280x1024x32)	29.0	29.4
3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)	68.7	68.4
3D WinBench 2000 CPU Tests	1.5	1.6

ATI'S GRAPHICS **ACCELERATOR** IS A **NICE ALTERNATIVE** TO GEFORCE

Maxx'ed Out

by Loyd Case

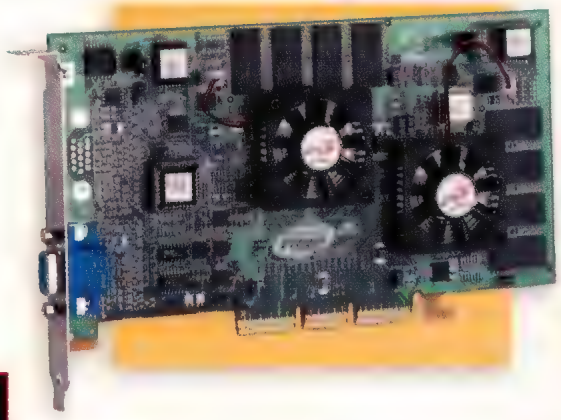

photo by Hayden Houser

It's one of life's little ironies that ATI has shipped its dual-chip graphics card months ahead of 3dfx's multichip Voodoo5. The Rage Fury Maxx pairs up two ATI Rage 128 Pro chips, each with its own dedicated 32MB of RAM to create a fast 3D accelerator. It's not as fast as a GeForce 256 DDR board, but it is cheaper.

Each Rage 128 Pro chip and dedicated pool of memory is responsible for rendering alternate frames. This differs from 3dfx's SLI (scan-line interleave) technology, where each chip is responsible for every other horizontal line of pixels. ATI calls this AFR, or alternate-frame rendering. As the performance numbers indicate, the technology performs quite well.

The downside is that you really only have a 32MB card at your disposal. It's similar to having two separate, 32MB graphics accelerators on a single AGP card.

The DVD-playback performance is quite good, too, although ATI's soft DVD player is a little spartan. In addition, we noticed some minor artifacts in fog, which will be fixed in a future driver release. ATI's OpenGL drivers are also pretty robust. The card does quite well in 32-bit color, with performance decreasing only slightly. Installation is relatively easy, and the ATI control panel has steadily evolved into something that's now slick and useful.

At $229, it's cheaper than a DDR GeForce board, and you'll no doubt find it discounted. It's a great performer for today's games, so if a GeForce is too rich for your blood, the Rage Fury Maxx is worth a close look. CGW

ATI RAGE FURY MAXX

System Requirements: System with AGP 2X slot or better
3D Support: Direct3D, OpenGL
Manufacturer: ATI • Price: $229 (MSRP) • Contact: www.ati.com

	Guillemot Prophet DDR/DVI GeForce 256	ATI Rage Fury Maxx
3D GameGauge Score	**61.49 fps**	**55.56 fps**
Content Creation WinStone (1280x1024x32)*	29.00	28.60
3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)	68.70	55.60
QUAKE 3 ARENA (1600x1200x32)	13.50 fps	6.50 fps
RE*VOLT (1600x1200x32, 24-bit textures)	41.15 fps	47.99 fps

* (Tests 2D-graphics speed)

Gadget of the Month

HandSpring Visor

Here at *CGW*, we're not much on cults. Oh, there's Jeff Green and his kinky rituals involving the office garden-gnome, and Robert Coffey's rants about how the Partridge Family will reunite and bring about the end of the world; but that aside, the only other cult here at *CGW* is the Cult of Palm—a band of editors who can been seen scribbling on their personal data assistants (PDAs) under the guise of "getting organized," when they're really just playing TIGER WOODS GOLF.

But PDAs are here to stay, and a new company, HandSpring, has licensed the Palm OS and is bringing to market their Visor PDA, which will look a lot like the PalmPilot, except that Visor will have what are being dubbed "Springboard modules." These add-ons will add functionality ranging from a modem for Web-surfing and email to a GPS device for navigation, and even an MP3 player. Another notable difference: the price. Visors will start at $149, a good deal less expensive than the latest Palm VII, which retails at around $500. With a boatload of shareware games already out there for the Palm OS, and some hope of further commercial title development, you can use that whole "getting organized" rationale for getting yourself a mobile gaming platform.

Game Controller Roundup

Take Control

New Controllers To Get You in the Game

Guillemot Ferrari Force-Feedback Wheel

Logitech WingMan Digital Extreme USB

Saitek X-36 USB

GUILLEMOT FERRARI FORCE-FEEDBACK WHEEL

Requirements: Windows 95 (serial port) or Windows 98 (USB or serial port)
Price: $129
Manufacturer: Guillemot
Contact: www.guillemot.com

Yes, a Ferrari logo on a $129 wheel is a little odd, but this wheel is a superb implementation of Immersion's I-Force technology.

In arcade racers like NEED FOR SPEED III, this wheel is simply terrific. I was able to set it up to get a good road-feel, and won races far more often than I lost them, including against some tough human opponents. The wheel even fared well in NASCAR LEGENDS – I was able to find the groove on most tracks fairly easily. The same wasn't true for GRAND PRIX LEGENDS, though, where cars are quite squirrelly, and here the wheel just didn't feel precise enough.

The pedals feel a little plasticky, but worked well. At $129, the new Guillemot wheel is a great deal. – *Loyd Case*

LOGITECH WINGMAN DIGITAL EXTREME USB

Requirements: Windows 98, USB port or joystick port
Price: $39
Manufacturer: Logitech
Contact: www.logitech.com

Persistence pays off. Logitech has been doing joysticks for the better part of four years, and they have been steadily improving. Their latest WingMan Digital Extreme incorporates USB functionality, a twist-rudder, and a modified throttle design, all of which come together to produce an excellent controller for under $40 bucks.

I took this WingMan for a spin through FREESPACE 2, FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3, Jane's USAF, and ACES HIGH. In all instances, the stick worked superbly using the standard USB HID driver, which obviated the need to install a proprietary driver. Its seven-button design places two buttons on the base, a standard trigger for your index finger, then four buttons for your right thumb. Although my thumb felt a bit overwhelmed with choices at times, this is a very solid stick that's also a great deal. It would make an excellent addition to your arsenal. – *Dave Salvator*

SAITEK X-36 USB

Requirements: Windows 98, USB port or joystick Windows 98, DirectX 7a, free USB port or standard joystick game-port
Price: $150
Manufacturer: Saitek
Contact: www.saitekusa.com

Saitek has consistently brought new and interesting designs to the game-controller market. Their X-36 stick/throttle combo is no exception, and their latest incarnation adds USB support and does away with the dreaded keyboard pass-through, which gave X-36 users headaches due to its varying keyboard-port polling rates. This move to USB also seems to have solved the "sticky keys" problem that earlier Saitek controllers had.

The new X-36 combo feels solid as usual, though throttle detentes are mushy and not well defined. But, having this sophisticated controller just come up and work using USB is a welcome change. Saitek's Gaming Extensions programming interface does a pretty good job of simplifying the esoteric art of controller programming, particularly for HOTAS (hands on throttle and stick) setups in complicated flight sims like FALCON 4. All told, Saitek has taken an already solid design, and made some good improvements. It's still a bit pricey, but for sim pilots looking for a solid all-in-one combo (that includes a rudder control in the throttle), the X-36 USB warrants a serious look. – *Dave Salvator*

Product photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

ACT LABS SHIFTER

Requirements: ACT Labs Force RS or RS racing wheel
Price: $69
Manufacturer: ACT Labs
Contact: www.actlab.com

If you have an ACT Labs racing wheel, you must get this. If you don't have an ACT Labs wheel, you might consider getting one just to have the Shifter.

The Shifter mounts next to an ACT Labs RS or Force RS racing wheel, and the eight shift positions replace the button controls on the wheel.

The Shifter ships with a limited version of RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP, a European rally racing simulation from UK developer Magnetic Fields. It's a superb rally game, and fully supports the shifter. You can even remove the rubber shifter knob and replace it with a real knob with your favorite car logo. This has got to be one of the cooler ideas to come out of ACT Labs in a long time.

Unfortunately, RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP is the *only* game that currently supports the shifter's full functionality. So, until more game companies support the stick (and we fervently hope they do), the shifter will be a pony with one very cool trick. – *Loyd Case*

AVB FBJ-1 FORCE-FEEDBACK JOYSTICK

Requirements: DirectX 7a, USB port
Price: $85
Manufacturer: AVB
Contact: www.avbtech.com

In the world of force feedback, joysticks have taken a back seat to wheels as of late. But AVB, a relative newcomer to the controller scene has a new joystick offering that's worth a look. Their FBJ-1 stick at $85 is the least expensive force-feedback stick on the market. But don't let the price fool you. The AVB crew did a very good job implementing Immersion's I-Force technology, and the result is a comfortable controller that does a good job rendering forces.

During a spin through FREESPACE 2 and Microsoft FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2000, the FBJ-1 rendered all forces well, and with pretty good torque to get the point across. The stick has the usual four-button setup with view-hat, plus another four buttons on the base for your left hand. The only low points are the throttle and rudder controls, both of which are dials. Both had a cheap feel to them, and the rudder control didn't re-center quickly. But that aside, this is a solid controller, and at $85, maybe now you can afford a little force in your gaming life. – *Dave Salvator*

RAZER BOOMSLANG 1000

Requirements: USB port or PS/2 port
Price: $70
Manufacturer: Razerzone
Contact: www.razerzone.com

Walking away with the Strangest Product Name accolades for 1999, the Razer Boomslang is billed as an "ultra-sensitive 1000dpi mouse for first-person shooters." And while the Boomslang does perform pretty well in shooters, don't toss out your current varmint just yet.

Boomslang's control-panel software is cool enough, with settings o' plenty, including an adjuster for polling rate for the PS/2 version of the mouse. Boomslang installed without a complaint, and during a rumble through UNREAL TOURNAMENT, performed well. Does it reinvent the mouse as we know it? Well, no. In fact, in sniper mode, where that 1000dpi resolution would presumably help the most, I couldn't tell any difference between it and a garden-variety Microsoft IntelliMouse. Also, Boomslang's mouse-wheel feels overly notchy, and doesn't turn smoothly.

Again, mouse choice for shooters is the stuff of religious feuds, so your experience with the Boomslang might be different. But the Boomslang, though competent, failed to make a convert out of me. – *Dave Salvator*

Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

Neptune: Windows 2000 for the Rest of Us

New Gamer-Friendly Version of Windows 2000 Shows Promise

A few columns back, I wrote about Windows 2000 beta 3. At that time, there were some fairly significant problems with the new operating system, but most seemed related to drivers and the general squirreliness that affects all beta software.

As it turns out, Windows 2000 may not be as friendly to gamers as I'd hoped. It's a definite improvement over Windows NT4, but it won't really create a gamer's nirvana, which I define as a stable operating system that runs all the games out there.

There's been very little effort on the part of Microsoft to qualify games for Windows 2000. And guess what? Many of them still don't run, even with proper drivers.

Enter Neptune, the code name for Microsoft's consumer version of Windows 2000. The Neptune team tested compatibility with Windows 2000 using about 800 games from PC Data's sales charts since the first Windows 95 games began shipping years ago. What they found wasn't pretty: Only 50-60% of the games will run "out of the box" under Windows 2000. Some could be made to run with a few tweaks or hacks, but many simply tanked.

Sometime this spring, Microsoft will be shipping Millennium, the last version of Windows that will use the Windows 9x kernel. The next version of Windows for the home will be based on Windows 2000—that's Neptune.

What I've seen of the early beta of Neptune is encouraging, although there's still a lot of work to be done. What follows is a report based on a beta using an alpha-quality driver for the GeForce 256, so consider that some of the glitches I encountered are attributable to the "half-baked" nature of the project. I'll try to call out what's a Windows problem and what's not. I was only able to try out a handful of titles, but I'll be exercising Neptune more in the coming months. Here's the list of games I tested: UNREAL TOURNAMENT, MECHWARRIOR 3, JANE'S USAF, JANE'S WW2 FIGHTERS, EUROPEAN AIR WAR, BATTLEZONE II, FREESPACE 2, TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS, and QUAKE III ARENA.

The Good News

One of the problems with Windows 2000 beta 3 was audio—the drivers just weren't up to speed. That's not an issue with Neptune. I dropped an Aureal SQ2500 into my systems, and the only audio problem I encountered was some break-up during a video sequence, but that probably wasn't directly related to audio.

The Neptune team has added a lot of tweaks to improve compatibility. One such tweak is to have the operating system inform a game that Neptune isn't NT. It doesn't work completely, but remember that Neptune won't release until some time next year.

A number of the games ran quite well. QUAKE III ARENA was a no-brainer; the boys at id have done a great job with multi-platform support, so it was no surprise that it ran so smoothly. TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS worked well, too, in both single-player and multiplayer mode. FREESPACE 2 ran flawlessly, both in single- and multiplayer.

Neptune will support dual processors, so game developers may be taking more interest in adding multiprocessor support to their titles—though the jury's still out on that one.

It's clear that there's a lot of work yet to be done, but Neptune could get us one step closer to gaming nirvana, with far less time spent troubleshooting and far more time spent gaming.

The Bad News

The biggest problems encountered were graphics-related, in titles like MECHWARRIOR 3, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, and BATTLEZONE II. There were similar problems with the 2D menus in the two flight sims. JANE'S WW2 FIGHTERS would reboot the system if you accessed the options menu two or three times—and the options menu would never actually show the options. JANE'S USAF fared better, running well in 3D mode, but again, you couldn't access any menu and the system would reboot upon exit. Note that FALCON 4.0 runs very well under NT and Windows 2000.

A New Hope

You shouldn't take any of my problems as implicit criticism; in fact, I think Neptune shows great promise. If I have any criticism, it's that Neptune is still a year away, and that Microsoft realized too late that gamers would be interested in Windows 2000.

It's clear that there's a lot of work yet to be done, but Neptune could get us one step closer to gaming nirvana, with far less time spent troubleshooting and far more time spent gaming. CGW

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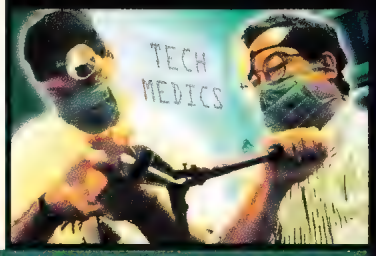
Tech Medics



You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to **cgw_hardware@zd.com.**

Rip Out AMR

What is the AMR (Audio Modem Riser) slot on my motherboard for, and will it work with my ISA cards?

The AMR slot is a special slot designed for low-cost modem and sound card solutions. These cards are typically an interface between the CPU and the outside world, with some digital-to-analog and analog-to-digital conversion, and perhaps an AC97 CODEC chip. However, it's the CPU that handles all the real work for both modem chores and audio. If you get a system with an AMR card installed, rip that puppy out and put in a real modem and sound card.

Multiple Monitors

I'm trying to take advantage of Windows 98 multiple-monitor support. I'm using an STB Velocity 4400 AGP and a Voodoo3 2000 PCI card. So far, everything works just fine. However, I'm having trouble setting the AGP card as the primary graphics card instead the PCI. Is it possible to change this? If so, how?

You probably need to get a BIOS updated for your motherboard. Newer BIOS versions allow you to assign priority to either AGP or PCI as the primary graphics card.

They Don't Do Windows

I used to play DUKE NUKEM 3D with a friend of mine across town over our U.S.Robotics 33.6 ISA modems. We recently upgraded and now have 56k modems. I still use Windows 95B and he uses Windows 98, and we can't call each other and play. What's the problem? We go to setup and match up the same settings using our second phone lines to double-check every change. If he calls me, it doesn't pick up or if it does, all he gets is a blank screen.

What's probably going on is that one or both of your new modems are WinModems and DUKE NUKEM 3D is a DOS game. You can play DUKE from within Windows, so you might try that. Otherwise, your only option may be to replace the offending WinModem with one that has a hardware controller and can function in DOS. That, or switch to UNREAL TOURNAMENT.

Curious Cursors

I am using a GeForce256 Asus Deluxe graphics accelerator card. When I play 3D games, the mouse pointer often appears on-screen, though this doesn't happen in 2D games. Do you know how to get rid of the mouse pointer?

Check your mouse control panel. It's very likely that you're using one of Windows' custom software cursors, or a cursor that came with your mouse software. Many games, 3D games in particular, don't like anything other than the default Windows cursor.

Overcrowding

I'm planning to buy a Sound Blaster Live Platinum, a DVD-ROM, and a CD-RW. My motherboard is an Abit BE6-2, and there are 2 IDE connectors on the board. This is the tricky bit: If I connect my hard drive to one of the IDE connectors, and then the DVD-ROM to the other IDE connector, where can I connect my CD-RW?

You should probably connect the CD-RW to the same connector as the DVD-ROM drive. Make the DVD-ROM drive the master (many DVD drives actually require this), and the CD-RW the slave.

TECHTIP Upgrade DirectX to Solve Controller Problems

Seems like every time Microsoft fixes one bug in DirectX, they create a couple of others. USB game controllers were delayed while Microsoft fixed the faulty USB code in DirectX 5. It looked like they had solved the problem in DirectX 6, but then along came DirectX 7—and USB controllers had trouble again. To fix USB problems, particularly problems with some force-feedback controllers, download DirectX 7a at www.microsoft.com/directx/homeuser/downloads/.

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Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
NEW **Motherboard**	Asus P3C-E	$160	AGP 4x
NEW **CPU**	Coppermine 800	$730	It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$700	RAMBUS
NEW Disk Controller	Adaptec 2940u2w	$260	80 megabytes per second
NEW **Primary Graphics**	Hercules Prophet DDR-DVI	$300	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$680	A little warmer than the Fujitsu, but much faster
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	2 gigs of safety
CD-ROM	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD	$160	New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020u	$1,250	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$175	For four- speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
Speakers	Klipsch Promedia	$250	Beautiful imaging, clean sound
Modem	3Com SDSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$60	For fragging my buddies
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Case	Yeong Yang Minicube case	$213	Lots of cooling
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	In with the Natural, out with the Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	$65	No balls!
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$6,350
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Action Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like controller
		Total	$7,805

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like **www.computershopper.com** or **www.pricewatch.com**. - *Lists compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.*

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F
CPU	Pentium III/600E
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
NEW **Primary Graphics**	Guillemot Prophet (SDR)
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	IBM Deskstar 22GXP 9.1GB
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
NEW **Monitor**	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Aureal SQ2500
Secondary Audio	N/A
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB
Power Supply	Built-in, 235W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme Digital
Action Gamepad	Gravis GamePad USB

WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So, you asked for it, you got it. Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard. We have two recommendations for you.

If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers great price/performance, and will do a very good job with current games, and a good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Creative's 3D Annihilator 3D Pro, which goes for around $300 bucks. Admittedly a somewhat pricey bugger, this GeForce-based board uses DDR SDRAM memory to keep the GeForce's four pipelines fed and happy. If you can't stomach a $300 investment, then consider Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra, which is available now for around $150.

Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU, you can migrate either of these cards into your new setup. They've got room to grow with whatever CPU you mate them with.

FUTURE PROOFING

Once again, we're on the cusp of transitioning to new motherboard technology. On the Intel side, the 820 chipset is now shipping, and RDRAM supplies are loosening up but are still very pricey. On the Athlon side of the coin, new motherboards that support PC133 SDRAM and AGP 4x are starting to arrive on the scene.

If you're contemplating an Intel CPU, consider an SDRAM riser card, which will allow you to use SDRAM in a system with RDRAM sockets. We'll report on how well that works in the next issue. Asus was on the verge of shipping at press time, and it may be a viable option to hold you over until RDRAM prices drop. That way, you can get a Coppermine CPU that supports a 133MHz front-side bus. If you are considering Athlon, definitely invest in PC133 SDRAM – it will work fine in current-generation Athlon boards, and move with you to faster motherboards.

Unfortunately, there's newer memory and core logic technology coming down the pipe later this year, but at least these new technologies should support CPU speeds to 800MHz and AGP 4x for graphics – good enough for gaming well into 2001. *–Loyd Case*

Price	The Skinny
$125	5 PCI slots, Softmenu, 440BX
$445	Great bang for buck
$188	128MB, squeezed in
$0	
$225	Went for 32-bits + T&L
$20	Still gotta have it
$120	IBM's low cost, fast drive
$105	Slot-drive DVD
$350	New 19" "Q"uality model
$99	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$0	
$70	Went back to our favorites
$80	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old familiar
$0	
$24	Cheap; nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
Total w/o Ammo Controllers	$1,956
$39	Solid, low-cost 3D stick with USB
$30	Solid, basic gamepad
Total	$2,035

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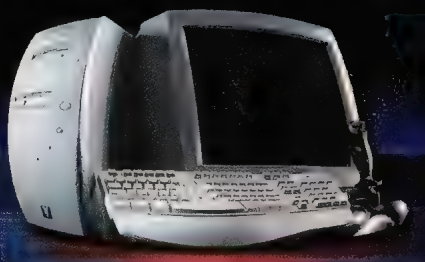

EDITORS' CHOICE

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Creative Labs 56K V.90 Hardware Modem
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HyperSonic PC System Recovery CD

OPTIONS

Monitors:
17" Mitsubishi 71 .25MM 1280x1024 Monitor - $329
19" Mitsubishi 90e .25MM 1600x1200 Monitor - $499

Storage:
Iomega 100MB Zip Drive w/ Cartridge - $89
HP CD-Writer Plus 9100i 4xW/4xWR/24xR - $299

Controllers:
Logitech Wingman Extreme 3D Digital USB - $49
Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad Pro USB - $45

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Planescape: Torment

How To Die With a Good-Looking Corpse in Sigil

By Chris Avellone

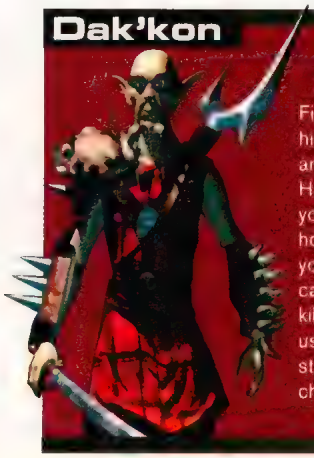
You'd think that the inability to die would make a game really easy, but in reality, it doesn't. *Rather than crank out a typical walk-through, we decided to ask lead designer Chris Avellone for an insider's perspective on some of the more hidden aspects of* PLANESCAPE: TORMENT. ***Be warned, there's quite a bit of plot-spoiler material in here.*** *You might want to wait until you're ready to play the game through a second time before reading on.*

We Like To Party

Out of PLANESCAPE's seven recruitable NPCs, only five can be used at a time (Nameless One makes for number six). For a designer's perspective on the perfect party, I'm going to go two routes: one from a practical, power-gamer standpoint; the other from a "who I like best" standpoint.

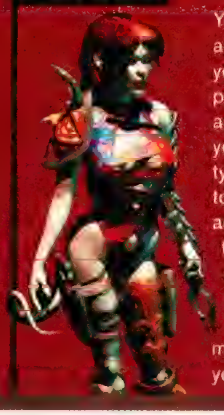
From a practical standpoint, the perfect party is the following: Dak'kon, Annah, Morte (only up until Ravel), and Nordom. You'll have fewer party members overall, but that means that each one gets more XP.

Dak'kon



Needed for 500 reasons. First off, he's a great fighter; his blade is already powerful and levels up along with him. He can both cast and give you spells. He's a treasure house of experience points if you have a high Wisdom. He can easily evolve into a killing machine. Since he can use tattoos also, give him strength ones and let him chainsaw through enemies.

Annah

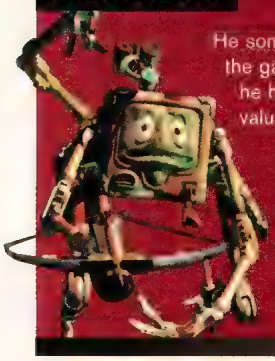


You need at least one thief. Having her sneak around areas and backstab enemies can get you through some pretty tough fights. She's pretty questionable if you're a big tough fighter and don't worry too much about fights, but if you like thieves – Annah's the woman. Her ability to use tattoos is another plus. The best thing to do with her is to save *all* your dirty-rat charms as you get them, get her in your party, give them to her until her pick pocket is 100%+, then systematically go through every city map in the game and steal from everyone. You'll become filthy-rich very quickly, and there's no alignment hit or guards chasing you (well, provided you succeed).

Morte

Morte's long-term value is debatable. He's a good backpack to carry tons of stuff. I would recommend using him only for the following: using his Litany of Curses in any battle against a mage. The Litany will interrupt any spell the mage is firing off, as well as weaken his attack potential overall. After meeting Ravel, he's not terribly helpful anymore. He's a little more worthwhile when you pump up his statistics after talking to Fall-From-Grace; he then becomes the world's deadliest damage sink, but even so, he's not the most efficient party member you can have. Drop him to get more XP for the rest of the group after Ravel.

Nordom



He somehow became the best NPC in the game, combat-wise. The fact that he has missile weapons makes him valuable. He also has a decent number of hit points, and the ability to improve his stats significantly. To top it off, the horrific addition of an item called "Optix" makes him a geometric killing machine. We really had no idea how dangerous he could become.

Based on personality

From a personality standpoint, I'm kind of biased, since I love all the characters. If I were to choose the optimal party based on personality, I'd choose: Dak'kon, Annah, Morte, Fall-From-Grace, and Nordom (hmm, what a coincidence...being a designer has its perks).

Annah

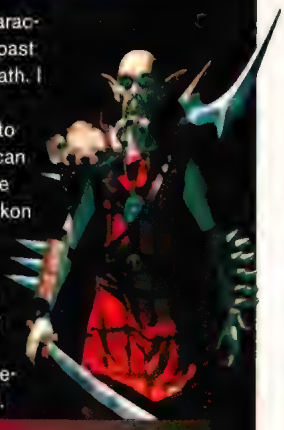
Annah is just...well, I just like her. She has a cute accent, has a total thing for the player character, and she reminds me of Sheena Easton (her voice). She's a fun character to flirt and interact with, and her bursts of jealousy with Fall-From-Grace are kind of entertaining. She has some of the best voice-acting combos with the other NPCs as well – Sheena Easton did a lot of improv with the lines we gave her, and they were much better and funnier than the ones we came up with.

Morte

...just because I've always liked him. He's good for a laugh, and I really enjoy his Skull Mob power, his taunts, and his voice-acting comments with the other characters (especially Nordom and Annah). I also think his motivation for traveling with the player character is really powerful, and it really endears me to him. Plus, it's fun to play with the Modron Cube when he's around.

Dak'kon

Dak'kon is an extremely deep character, even though it's hard to see past the surface to the suffering beneath. I loved writing the Circles of Zerthimon; I think Dak'kon's ties to the player and the memories he can invoke are some of the best in the game. You can actually help Dak'kon weather his crisis of faith, to become something far more than the broken shell he is when the game begins. Just interacting with him and helping him has been one of the most positive role-playing experiences I've ever had.



Fall-From-Grace

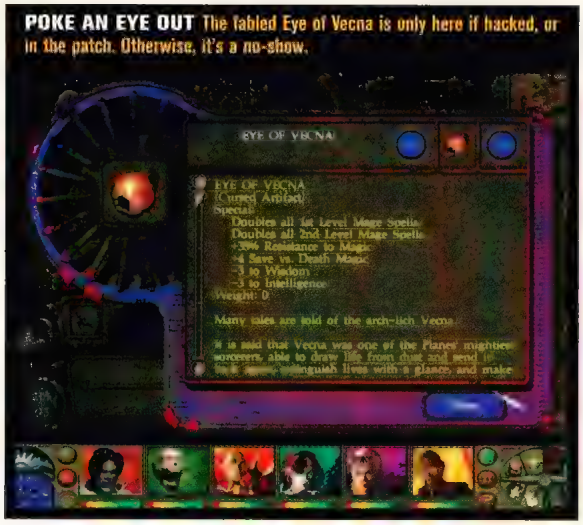
I would choose Fall-From-Grace based on her voice alone. The voice actress, Jennifer Hale, was just awesome – she got her personality and temperament just right. All the voice-acting comments with her are cool; she's got a great personality; and I really like her critical hits and spell animations. I love the fact that Fall-From-Grace never lets anything bother her – she shrugs off even the nastiest insults with a good temper. I also love the fact that Fall-From-Grace is a succubus who's fighting her own nature, making her exactly the opposite of what you'd expect.

Nordom

Nordom is just awesome. He's like a deadly little baby brother who's trying to figure out how the world works. There's so many reasons why I like him: the way his crossbows are more worldly than he is; how he's totally unstable in a logical kind of way; he has some of the best voice-acting combos, the coolest upgrades, a whole crapload of experience point gains, and he can snag some of the best equipment in the game. I also like the fact that when you help Nordom figure out why he's become the way he is, he can help *you* puzzle out your condition, and he makes some real dead-on analyses.

Easter Eggs/Neat Tips

■ First things first: The Eye of Vecna doesn't seem to be in the game. The way it was supposed to work was that when you returned to Sigil before going to the Fortress Of Regrets, you could go to Giscorl's or Vrischika's store and buy it. Alas, it was not meant to be. I should have assigned someone to test this; we may be able to implement it in a patch later on. For now, if you want the Eye of Vecna (it's not that great of an item though, despite its infamous history/reputation), you'll have to hack your savegame.



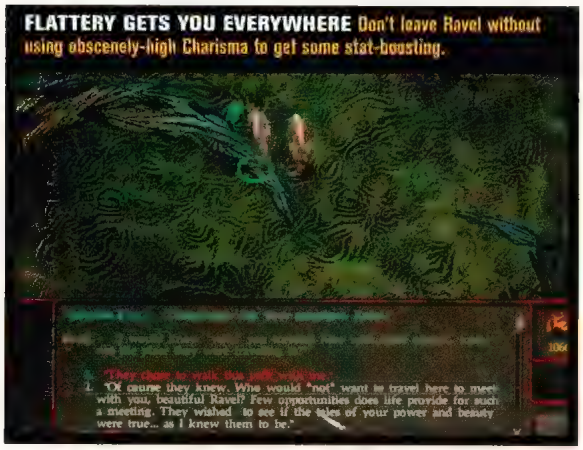
POKE AN EYE OUT The fabled Eye of Vecna is only here if hacked, or in the patch. Otherwise, it's a no-show.

■ Bring a cranium rat tail to Barking-Wilder, and if you're a Chaosman, you can see their "special store." You can also join the Chaosmen *more* than once, and get bonus "chaos points" by doing that. Furthermore, you can become the Chaosmen *leader* if your chaos points are high enough when you speak to Barking-Wilder.

■ Conversely, being really lawful helps you with Vhailor. Try talking to him about weapon training; if your alignment is lawful (any), you can get a really nice bonus to Strength. Also, the more lawful you are, the more strength points you get—the bonus can be as high as +3 STR.

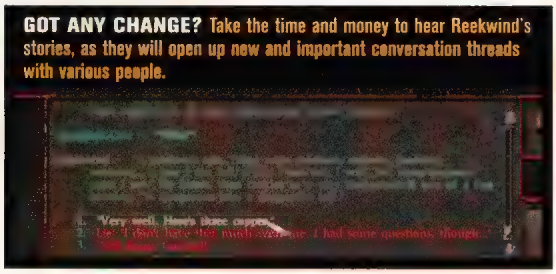
■ Just as Annah can give you permanent bonuses to your thief skills, you can give *her* permanent bonuses to thief skills if yours are high enough (with enough charms, this is really easy to do). When any one of your thief skills is 50% or higher, initiate a dialogue and offer to give her some tips. Each skill you train her in gives her a +3% automatic bonus to one of her skills, and some experience points to boot.

■ Making out with Annah after Ravel's maze is not only fun, but it makes her tougher. After kissing her, she gains +5% Normal and Magical Fire Resistance because her demon blood "awakens."


1. "Of course they knew. Who would "not" want to travel here to meet with you, beautiful Ravel? Few opportunities does life provide for such a meeting. They wished to see if the tales of your power and beauty were true... as I knew them to be."

FLATTERY GETS YOU EVERYWHERE Don't leave Ravel without using obscenely-high Charisma to get some stat-boosting.

■ It's worthwhile to pay Reekwind, the Hive storyteller, for *every* story he has, including the one about Pharod. They open up a lot of conversation options with the following people: Pharod, Annah (you can get some XP out of this, actually), and Ignus. Furthermore, I don't know if anyone discovered this, but you can tell Reekwind a story if your Intelligence (or Wisdom) is above 13. If *you* finish the tale yourself, you get a cool little charm.



GOT ANY CHANGE? Take the time and money to hear Reekwind's stories, as they will open up new and important conversation threads with various people.

■ If you lie to enough people and tell them your name is Adahn, you can imagine someone named Adahn into existence at the Smoldering Corpse Bar. Usually you have to lie to eleven people, but what some gamers don't know is that the Dustman Mourners outside the Mortuary count as four of them, making your quest that much easier. Keep in mind you have to speak to Quentin first, in order to be able to speak to the Mourners.

IMAGINARY FRIEND Here's a neat Easter Egg: Keep on lying about being Adahn, and, lo and behold...

■ Some people have difficulty accessing some of Nordom's cooler improvement options and list of programming duties. To do this, you have to have encountered the modron wizard and spoken to him about what happened to the old director. As long as you know that the old Creative Director was destroyed, you can talk to Nordom about what he was doing in Rubikon, and then tell him you're the new creative director. From there, you get a lot of options about Nordom's duties.

■ One of Nordom's options for improvement comes up if the player is a mage and his Intelligence is greater than 16. When this occurs, Nordom vomits a bunch of junk from his head—one of them is more than it appears. When used, this minor artifact allows the player to learn a spell called Enoll Eva's Duplication that is available nowhere else in the game.

■ Kissing Ravel is a brave thing to do—and it gives fighters a great tattoo at Fell's shop, if you want to risk it and cash in. It gives +2 STR, +2 CON, and +1 Saving Throw vs.

STUCK GEAR Talk with Nordom, and look closely at your junk, and you'll get a spell you won't get anywhere else.

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HEAD RUSH Morte's Skull Mob gets better and better as he levels up.

Paralyzation, but it reduces your INT and WIS each by -1. Still, if you want to be a badass fighter, it's a great tattoo.

- There are three specific instances where a super-high Charisma is useful: Ravel, the Pillar of Skulls, and Nordom. Use spells and charms to pump up your Charisma to 25, and you can: flatter Ravel to get some stat gains, lie to the Pillar of Skulls regarding Fhjull, and have Nordom go through a self-improvement course to give him significant stat gains.
- Note that Morte's Skull Mob gets more powerful as he goes up in level. Its damage is level-based, so when he's 10th, 12th, or whatever, Skull Mob can inflict up to 70 HP of damage.
- Keep Deionarra's wedding ring with you, and talk to her before you enter the Fortress of Regrets. She will then bolster its power for you. CGW

Finding Trainers

There're a number of trainers that can switch you between fighter, thief, and mage. Here's a list of them along with their locations in the game. Keep in mind that having Annah and Dak'kon in your party is useful because they can switch you at any time, provided there are no enemies about.

Thief

- **Ratbone:** Ragpicker's Square, right outside Sharegrave's kip.
- **Eli Havelock:** Clerk's Ward, watching the poet and grumbling.
- **Lenny:** Lower Ward, southern section, north of the wrecked house. Note: He gives great punch daggers as a reward for training.
- **Nabat:** One of the bar patrons in the Traitor's Gate Tavern in Curst.

Mage

- **Sebastion:** Lower Ward, NW corner on drawbridge thing near the Marketplace.
- **Mebbeth:** Shuffling about her hut in Ragpicker's Square.
- **Lady Thorncombe:** Wandering around the Public Sensorium in the Civic Festhall.
- **Kitla:** One of the bar patrons in the Traitor's Gate Tavern in Curst.

Fighter

- **Porphiron:** Mumbling monk in the Hive, NW section, Northeast of Flophouse.
- **Corvus:** Thuggish-looking fellow in the Lower Ward, SW section, swinging his axe.
- **Qui-Sai:** A stone gensai hiding in one of the Civic Festhall's meeting rooms.
- **Marquez:** Harmonium officer in Curst, in the Traitor's Gate Tavern.

CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

Reader Tip: Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings

I have a tale to tell thee. I have a strategy, a strategy created in the long and noble tradition of our lord and savior Sir Jeff Green, for whom we are named (The Knights of the Green Day). So gather round, all ye faithful, and harken to the words I shall speak unto thee. When playing the game of AGE OF EMPIRES II (specifically a co-op deathmatch), during the first few minutes, send several of thine villagers into the base of whom thou perceives to be the strongest of thine allies, and create a heavily-defended stronghold in the middle of their base. Make sure there are many castles, walls, and towers – all garrisoned and guarding thee. Then proceed to wait. If thine allies get testy at your inaction, send small token armies off to fight. Make sure that at all times thou hast a large army so that when thou perceives that the battle comes to an end, thou canst send out an army and obliterate the remaining enemy forces, and therefore claim victory for thineself. The ranks of our armies kiss the ground upon which thy feet tread, Sir Jeff Green, our one true god of computer games.

–Monte

Congratulations to Monte, who won this month by sucking up to an editor (Jeff Green no less!). Lucky Monte gets a copy of *Wild Wild West* on tape, Activision's INTERSTATE '82, and 47-Tek's TEAM 47 GOMAN from our BozoBin©. Enjoy!

Battlezone II

Codes For all codes, hold [Ctrl]+[~] to bring down the console, then type:

game.cheat bzbody .....unlimited shields
game.cheat bzfree.....unlimited pilots and resources
game.cheat bzradar ....full map
game.cheat bztnt.....unlimited ammo
game.cheat bzview.....comsat link without having to power or build one

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

Here're the cheat codes to make life easier for you and Lara.

Level Skip

Face exactly North (open the inventory screen and check the compass needle; if it's transparent, you're facing North. If it isn't, try again). Select the "Load" option in the inventory, press and hold the "H E L P" keys, then release them. Leave the inventory and you'll automatically skip your current level.

All Weapons

Again, face exactly North. Now select a small medipak, and press and hold the "W E A P O N S" keys, and then release. Once you leave the inventory, you'll have all the weapons.

Unlimited Stuff

Face North. This time, select the large medipak, and then press and hold the "G U N S" keys. Now when you leave the inventory screen, you'll have unlimited amounts of everything.

Got a great tip for your favorite game?

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@zd.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line). We'll publish one submission each month. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the CGW BozoBin!

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RP

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NEW WORLD COMPUTING

3DO

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Pharoah

Codes While looking at your city, press [Ctrl]+[Alt]+[C] to bring up the cheat menu. Then, type in the codes below and hit [Return].

Treasure Chest.....add 1000 deben
mockattack1 .....land attack by enemy army
mockattack2 .....water attack by enemy army

The following codes force a "god event." The god must be present on the map for the cheat to work.

Osiris:
Bounty .....next inundation will be better than expected
Mummys Curse .....decreases next flood

Ra:
Pharaohs Glory .....exports next year will be raised by 50%
Bird of Prey.....trade partners trade less for a year

Ptah:
Supreme Craftsman...storage yard with room to spare filled up
Noble Djed.....shipwrights, weavers, jewelers are fully staffed

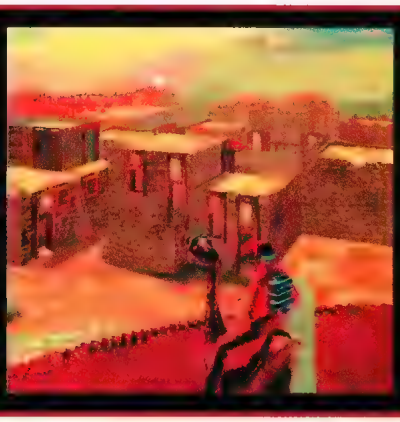
Seth:
Typhonian Relief.....protects soldiers sent to distant lands
Seth Strikes .....destroys your best company and their fort

Bast:
Cat Nip.....fills houses and bazaars with food and goods
Kitty Litter.....sends a plague

Outcast

Codes Just type HOKKUSPOKKUS, and then pull down the console by pressing [F12]. Type these codes for the desired effect.

Code	Effect	Code	Effect
ARSENAL	all weapons	POW #	energy = #
AMMO_FLOW	infinite ammo	POINTS	show points
DYNAMIT	dynamite	QUIT	quit the game
KILL_SOLDIERS	kill all enemies in level	NEIGE	warp to Ranzaar
		TEMPLES	warp to Shamazaar
IAMINVISIBLE	invisibility	VILLE	warp to Okriana
FLY	fly mode on/off	MONTAGNE	warp to Motazaar
TRACKER	radar	MARCHES	warp to Okasankaar
BENNY	no clipping	FOREST	warp to Okar



Ultima Ascension

Warning from the designers: Using these cheats can cause certain parts of the game to "break." For example, using the fly cheat can cause the player to possibly fly over crucial trigger areas and flag-setting areas, causing triggers to be broken and some parts of the story not to progress. The invulnerability cheat will also have a similar effect on the game. You may find yourself loading a save-game from much earlier, because a crucial trigger or flag was not set off at the appropriate place in the game.

In whichever directory you installed ULTIMA ASCENSION, there should be a file called "default.kmp." Open it with notepad or another text editor, and find the following line:

[Cheat Commands]

Simply add the following lines underneath it:

alt+shift+i = toggle_avatar_invulnerable
alt+shift+l = toggle_avatar_fly

During gameplay, pressing the corresponding keys (i.e., [alt]+[shift]+[i] or [alt]+[shift]+[l]) will activate the cheats.

You may also bind the following codes, just as you did the ones above:

pass_one_hour
unpass_one_hour
sunrise_sunset
pass_one_minute
unpass_one_minute
toggle_sun
toggle_wind
toggle_storms
toggle_avatar_fast

This image was created on a Falcon Gaming PC.
Things to Do:
1. Shop for new game
2. Shop falcon-nw.com for new hardware
3. Pickup plane tickets
Falcon
Falcon Northwest
Falcon Northwest
I hope your falcon gaming pc are keeping you warm!!
your game addicts

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Falcon Northwest Gaming PC's Will Cause Incredibly Smooth Graphics, Wall-Shaking Sound, Many Sleepless Nights, Severe Addiction, And May Cause Marital Strife. To Get Addicted Visit **www.falcon-nw.com** or call **1-888-FALCON1**

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fanbase@mail.com

Unreal Add-Ons

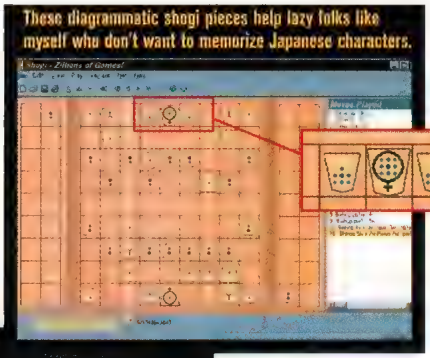
All this time you thought they shrink-wrapped *Computer Gaming World* to keep people from pilfering demo CDs, when actually they were trying to keep underage kids from seeing my face. Yikes. Anyway, on with the show...

I could fill an encyclopedia with praise for UNREAL TOURNAMENT. Out of the box it was one of the most fun titles I've ever played, and the new mutators and maps that roll out daily are keeping everything fresh. I think what has most impressed me, however, is the support Epic Megagames is giving to this title. In an age where the most customers expect is a series of patches to make a game actually playable, Epic releases a game that is nearly flawless from the get-go, and then takes time to give us some free extras.

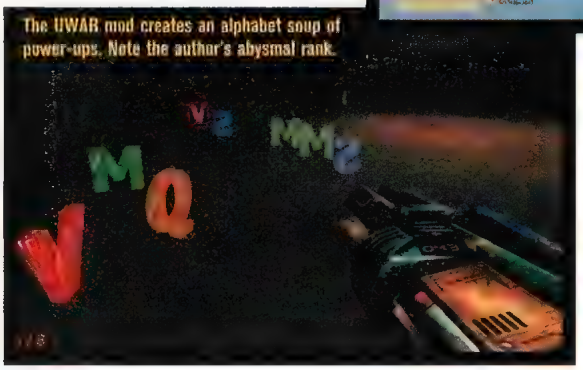
Cool New Stuff for the Game Of The Year

This support extends to the mod community. Epic has provided everything we need to make new levels, skins, gameplay rules, and nearly any other change the imagination can conceive. Yes, people have been creating mods for 3D shooters since the WOLFENSTEIN 3D days, but never has it been so easy. The scripting tools provided for mutator creation are simple enough to use that even I could make a basic mod, but powerful enough that real programmers can achieve spectacular results in very little time.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT makes every attempt to be accessible to newcomers to the genre, and the mutators reflect this philosophy. In the past, adding a mod required decompressing files, finding the correct folders to copy them to, making backups, and a lot of finger-crossing. Now any user can grab a umod file, double-click it, and that's it. Just another reminder of how much thought went into this game. You can keep up with the latest developments in the UT mod scene by visiting Mod Central Unreal at **www.planetunreal.com/modcentral.**



These diagrammatic shogi pieces help lazy folks like myself who don't want to memorize Japanese characters.



The UWAR mod creates an alphabet soup of power-ups. Note the author's abysmal rank.

T. Byrl's Mix

1. [illegible]
2. [illegible]
3. [illegible]
4. From the Earth to the Moon on DVD
5. Company Commander by Charles B. MacDonald

Dink Don't Stink

After blowing my monthly gaming budget, I began the familiar routine of scouring the Web for good freeware. I found a bunch – including a full version of SSG's THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE (**www.ssg.com.au/tao/tao_1.htm**) – but the real gem was a 25MB download starring Dink SmallWood. DINK used to be shareware, but Seth Robinson and his team decided to release the full version to the world as freeware (God bless 'em).

DINK SMALLWOOD plays a lot like the original THE LEGEND OF ZELDA for the Nintendo. You have the top-down perspective, the 2D sprites, and the ability to burn forests down tree-by-tree in search of a secret passage. The difference is that this game is beautiful, gory, and has a wonderful (and twisted) sense of humor. Be sure to look at the recommended system requirements in the READ.ME file to see what I mean.

The greatest aspect of DINK SMALLWOOD is the editor, which several talented fans have put to good use. Some of the add-on adventures are several times the size of the original game, and most are well-written and fun. Try anything by Mike Snyder to get a taste of the talent you can expect from this community. You can grab DINK SMALLWOOD and all the best D-MODs at **www.rtsoft.com/dink.** CGW

And the Bang For Your Buck Award Goes To...

You're fired. Your investments have tanked. Quicken just informed you that your entertainment budget for the year is $20. What do you do? Buy Zillions-of-Games. It's a strategy-game engine that has the ability to immediately know how to play a game once the rules are established. Tell it that you want all pawns to move like bishops in chess, and it'll immediately come up with tactical plans using those rules that will crush most opponents. Think of it as the Folgers Crystals of AI: Add rules, stir, and you have a fully-caffeinated opponent that at least reminds you of the real thing.

Minds sharper than mine create new games for this engine all the time, from slide puzzles to mind-bending chess variants. It's also easy to find new graphics for existing games, like Western-style Shogi pieces.

If you like abstract strategy games and don't have the brainpower of Deep Blue, Zillions-of-Games and its brainiac fan base will render time meaningless. Get the engine with over 300 games at **www.zillions-of-games.com**, and look for new games and variants at Fergus Duniho's Games Gallery (**duniho.fergus.com/games**) and the Chess Variants Pages (**www.chessvariants.com/programs.dir/zillions**).

INSIDE

ACTION

by Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen

thierry_nguyen@zd.com

Scooter's Mix

1. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
2. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
3. Any Given Sunday
4. The Mind's I by Douglas Hofstadter & Daniel Dennett
5. ALLEGIANCE beta

Quick Resolve

Y2K has come and gone, and boy, talk about an underwhelming cataclysm. Some folks spent time at $800/night hotel rooms, some dared to walk the streets, and I just stayed home. My only preparation for the nonexistent apocalypse was a closet packed full of Ramen – the best five dollars I ever spent.

New Year's Goals for Action Game Designers

Now that civilization is confirmed alive and well, I'm going to drag out a time-honored tradition: New Year's Resolutions. The difference here is that these aren't resolutions for *me*, but for action-game developers. I've already blown *my* resolutions; let's hope the designers can do better.

Resolution #1: Write better scripts. The first SYSTEM SHOCK set the stage, and JEDI KNIGHT and HALF-LIFE fully legitimized the mix of storytelling with action – but action games that tell good stories are still the exceptions. I'm *really* tired of the "ragtag group of space marines combating Satan/Corporatia/Russian Terrorists/Regis Philbin" backstory. The dialogue can be a lot better, too. Rather than just writing a stream of moronic one-liners, look at SYSTEM SHOCK 2, which rewarded players with gems like this: "What's clear is that SHODAN shouldn't be allowed to play God. She's far too good at it."

Resolution #2: Don't forget co-op play. Competitive shooters are great, but co-op play can be just as fun, if not more so. The trendsetters here are SYSTEM SHOCK 2, the first narrative-oriented game to include co-op play, and UNREAL TOURNAMENT and ROGUE SPEAR, both of which included strong team-play components. It's high-time for an entire co-op campaign.

Resolution #3: Use licenses well. To echo a past column: Please, when utilizing a license, do something innovative with it. Don't crank out a sub-par game that rehashes the plot of the movie/book/opera/game show. I'm not thinking of anyone in particular. Really. I'm just saying you won't get any critical acclaim if you screw up a license.

Resolution #4: No more pointless Bosses. I'm getting really tired of Bosses who must be defeated by shooting every one of your guns at a certain weak spot until you run out of ammo. Either dump the tired Boss convention, or make defeating each one an interesting puzzle that challenges a particular skill. Anyone stuck in the old-school "shoot me here till I die" mode should study the boss design behind HALF-LIFE or METAL GEAR SOLID.

Resolution # 5: Bring back destructible environments. Remember DUKE NUKEM 3D or the CRUSADER games from Origin? Where just about everything in the environment could be damaged or destroyed? While it may be too much to demand the interactive environment of, say, an ULTIMA game, designers could do a lot better than they're doing now. Dump those indestructible trash cans, or at least explain how they could be so much tougher than the Ultimate Boss Monster.

Resolution # 6: Let us save our games. I try to have a life; I go out to eat or talk to other people. I work (really!). I don't want to go through three-quarters of a level *again* just because my Ramen is done cooking and the designers forgot that – unlike consoles – PCs can save games at any time. I'm contradicting my boss' editorial (February, #187), but his kinds of changes are more sweeping and fundamental; until we find a better solution, add a "Save=yes" command to your code.

Resolution #7: Let us control the "camera" in third-person games. I'm tired of losing fights because of shrubbery or someone else's posterior obstructing my view. Make camera control a toggle; gamers who don't care can let the game control the camera, while those who do can take charge, rather than be driven to madness.

Okay, I'm asking for a lot. It'd be nice if at least one or two of these resolutions were taken seriously. These are some of the major factors that can make or break a game, and if at least one of them starts becoming a rule rather than an exception, the action genre would benefit greatly. If anyone in the industry takes all of these into account, well, keep an eye on them, because they may come up with an equal to HALF-LIFE or DOOM. CGW

Suburban Commando

Last year, RAINBOW SIX fans were blessed with EAGLEWATCH, an expansion pack that went above and beyond the call of duty: It made RAINBOW SIX the game it should have been. Now, Red Storm is ready to pull a similar feat with URBAN OPERATIONS, an expansion pack for ROGUE SPEAR. Most of the scenarios in URBAN OPERATIONS feature urgent urban situations, so players will have less intelligence information to work with and more random civilians to avoid plugging. The expansion will also include missions from the original RAINBOW SIX, updated to ROGUE SPEAR quality. New content and a refreshing update to old content. Gotta love it.

INSIDE

STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey

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Messing With Success

Although we game journalist outcasts frequently lament the plethora of sequels and follow-ups, you shouldn't take us entirely at face value. We may bitch and moan, but the fact is, we don't really hate all those established franchises. Blizzard's WARCRAFT series has given us two great games and what certainly looks to be a third smash, the same with CIVILIZATION, the same with MYTH, C&C, AGE OF EMPIRES, and non-strategy franchises like QUAKE, DESCENT, and all those WING COMMANDER games.

Why are some game companies intent on ruining great franchises?

But you've got to take care of them. You've got to keep them true to their spirit. Let them grime up like a Jack In The Box fast-food franchise, and you'll have the gaming equivalent of *e. coli* faster than you can say, "Oh dear god, make it stop, *make it stop*!"

Witness the proud MIGHT & MAGIC franchise and its lineage of sprawling RPGs and life-stopping, addictive strategy companions. Now, look at CRUSADERS OF MIGHT & MAGIC – on second thought, it's probably best you look away. How can I put this...what the hell were they thinking? Did anyone at 3DO truly think the world needed another TOMB RAIDER clone? Did some corporate jackal actually think that the proud HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC strategy games would somehow be enhanced by some tired, obvious knock-off starring a capering dunce in chain mail? Truth be told, I think they did: The first time anyone at *CGW* saw CRUSADERS was the same day this boxed aberration showed up at our offices.

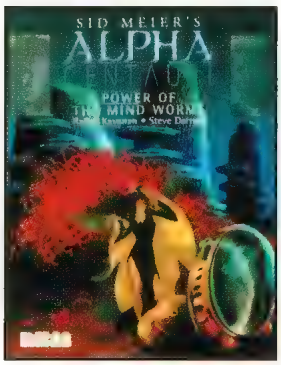
So here's a plea to all you game design gurus, gods, and geniuses: Don't screw it up. We love your franchises as much as (if not more than) you do, and we don't want you mucking around with the great things you've created just to try to pull a few more bucks from our wallets. We don't need an X-COM space sim, we don't want another YODA/INDIANA JONES DESKTOP ADVENTURE, and we never ever ever want to see another WING COMMANDER movie (not that any of us, or any of America for that matter, actually *saw* it). Show the same respect for your product that you want from us, and kill that WARCRAFT ADVENTURES title before you squander the very good will you've worked so hard to earn. CGW

The Worms Crawl in, the Worms Crawl Out

Rob's Mix

1. Magnetic
2. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
3. The Best American Sports Writing of the Century
4. THE KING
5. PINBALL: FANTASTIC JOURNEY

The worms eat your frickin' brain. At least that's the plot in the somewhat cumbersomely-titled *Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri: Power of the Mindworms*, a graphic novel based on – you guessed it, strategy fan – the equally poetically-entitled SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI. Based on a story idea by Michael Ely (the Firaxis designer responsible for the game chapters on the company Web site), this big fat comic book tells the story of a Gaian Talent who discovers she can control the brain-melting horrors everyone knows and loves – the mind worms. This internal conflict is set against an external conflict between the Gaians and the Morganites, who are both struggling to control the planet and to survive. For cavemen like me who at times struggled with the technology tree in the game, this is just the thing – a nice book with lots of pretty pictures. You can buy it at Amazon.com for about eight bucks.



Charity Cases

Well, at least the hurting didn't last too long. In a gaming promotion undoubtedly inspired by the Marquis de Sade, CGW editors Tom Price and Robert Coffey squared off against socially-shunned Gamespot goons Elliott Chin and Greg Kasavin in a multiplayer game of Activision's upcoming STAR TREK: ARMADA. As expected, Chin's surrender of his immortal soul to his dark lord and master Satan paid off in a swift and decisive victory against the combined Federation and Romulan might of CGW. It was ugly, but the good kind spirits that are Price and Coffey took solace in the fact that the event was for charity – $1000 was donated on behalf of Gamespot to Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc., while CGW won a $2500 consolation prize for CompuMentor. That provided some level of comfort – that and the knowledge that we could kick the godless ass of any Gamespot wonk at HIGH HEAT 2000.

So, in the end, we actually won.

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INSIDE

SIMULATIONS & SPACE

by Gordon Berg

grognard@concentric.net

Are We Having Fun Yet?

I recently returned from a weekend trip to an old friend's for some serious multiplayer LAN gaming. Most of the players at the event were fairly hardcore gamers, but none of them have really spent much time with any sort of flight sim. When they discovered that I write the sim column for *CGW* (just never you mind that I was wearing my "Hey! Ask me about *CGW*!" T-shirt), someone inevitably asked: "What flight sim do you recommend?" I hate this question because it usually comes from someone with no sim experience, and I often find myself at a loss for an answer.

Flight Sims Could Use a Little More Gameplay

Although there are plenty of sims I highly endorse, such recommendations are typically for the fellow sim enthusiast – preaching to the choir, if you will. When dealing with someone who has been raised on a steady diet of shooters and real-time strategy titles, the answer isn't as clear. For example, I'm thrilled with *CGW*'s choice for Flight Sim Of The Year: Rowan's MIG ALLEY. It offers some of the best dog fighting there is, and it sports a fully-dynamic campaign. But there's no way I would have told any of those guys from that weekend to go out and get MIG ALLEY as their first sim. It isn't the most user-friendly of choices: The view system is awkward; the in-flight navigation is Byzantine; and the campaign management is downright intimidating, if you decide to alter your default assignments.

To my surprise, though, I was also equally loath to recommend any of the supposedly "easy" sims. Just because a title has a gentler learning curve than FALCON 4 doesn't mean it's any fun. Then it hit me: "Whatever happened to the gameplay?"

Most sims these days offer enjoyment through precisely recreating an environment. Supposedly, the better the "you are there" feeling, the better time you have. For those who naturally gravitate toward sims in the first place, that's fine. But what about Joe Gamer? Short attention spans are rampant these days, so there's got to be something else that straps the average gamer in and keeps him there. Dumbing down a title isn't the answer – this only alienates both the hardcore and casual simmer. (Take note, NovaLogic... and are you reading this, Hasbro? Don't you dare screw with Tim Goodlett's vision for GUNSHIP!)

(Re)Blurring the Line

Yet this wasn't how it used to be. For example, STRIKE COMMANDER and WINGS OF GLORY (both Origin titles) offered involving storylines with interactive dialogue. And what about SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE? It depresses me to think how much better I would have done in school if it weren't for that particular title. Never have I cared more for my wingmen or worked so hard to help them survive. The ability to have them grow in experience and skill was by far one of SWOTL's most compelling facets. In fact, this is a great example of something that could help to restore gameplay magic to today's sims: role-playing elements.

No matter the genre, all games could benefit from the inclusion of what is traditionally an RPG game element. Other than a compelling storyline, it's the reward/incentive system (wherein experience is immediately parlayed into some new ability or enhancement) that drives the player forward in most games. Such a feature could do for sims what PANZER GENERAL did for wargames. Now, I'm not saying this will help Joe Gamer get through something like FLANKER 2. Hardcore sims have their place – and a preexistent customer base – and to bridge the gap between the potential simmer and the hardcore enthusiast requires more vision than simply offering an arcade mode. And no, I'm not talking about those lame power-ups in Psygnosis' NATIONS, either. Instead, I'm advocating a different kind of simulation that hearkens back to how it used to be, when a flight sim was first and foremost a game. CGW

Gordon's Mix

1. MIG ALLEY
2. THIEF GOLD
3. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 (co-op with the wife!)
4. ALLEGIANCE beta
5. The Lakers!!! (God bless Phil Jackson)

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

Say It, Don't Type It

Game Commander – the speech-recognition software from Mindmaker, Inc. – might only have earned three and a half stars in the July 1999 *CGW*, but it's come a long way since its buggy debut. In fact, Game Commander would be an ideal solution for any potentially frustrated flight novice who is without an expensive set of programmable joysticks, or who finds such complex controls intimidating. Why should you have to remember that a command like [Shift-f] drops the fuel tanks in MIG ALLEY (which might raise flaps in another sim), when you can simply say "Drop Tanks" instead? The latest version, Game Commander MX, is now also compatible with popular Internet voice-chat programs, such as Roger Wilco or Battlefield Communicator. Check it out at www.gamecommander.com.

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INSIDE

RPG/ADVENTURE

by Desslock
desslock@desslock.com

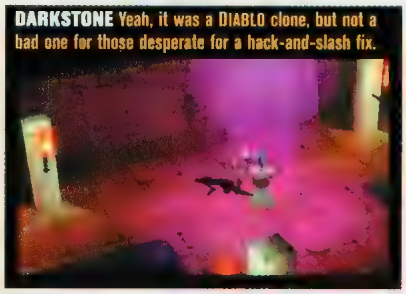
Shock and Torment

The Ottoman Empire was in a state of decline for centuries prior to its demise after World War I. From the 19th century onward, the stagnant Empire was dubbed the "sick man" of Europe. The lack of innovation in the RPG genre during the mid-1990s made it the Ottoman Empire of computer gaming, but the past couple years have made it apparent that the genre is healthy again. Take that, QUAKE-fan barbarians!

Two Novel Games Cap a Solid Year for RPGs

Online RPGs matured in 1999 with the release of EVERQUEST and ASHERON'S CALL. It's now possible to roleplay in immense environments largely free from the player-killer hassles and technical problems that afflicted the early online games. While we'll have to wait for the next generation of online RPGs for truly dynamic worlds and storylines as compelling as those in single-player games, both EVERQUEST and ASHERON'S CALL successfully advanced the genre. The first decent DIABLO clones also arrived in 1999. DARKSTONE, in particular, was a solid hack-and-slash action/RPG hybrid that appealed to many DIABLO fans, but REVENANT also had its share of advocates.

It was not a great year for the genre's holy trinity of ULTIMA, WIZARDRY, and MIGHT AND MAGIC. WIZARDRY 8 was originally scheduled for release in 1998 – and then 1999 – but it's still far from release and doesn't yet have a publisher. WIZARDRY fans should be encouraged that Sir-Tech Canada managed to release JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 – an impressive strategy game with significant RPG elements – under similar production circumstances. MIGHT AND MAGIC VII was a better game than its predecessor, but its reliance on an outdated engine lessened its appeal beyond series fans. And the initial, buggy release of ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION was a major disappointment.



DARKSTONE Yeah, it was a DIABLO clone, but not a bad one for those desperate for a hack-and-slash fix.

ASHERON'S CALL Online RPGs finally came into their own in 1999, with the incredible popularity of Sony's EVERQUEST and Microsoft's ASHERON'S CALL.

The best RPGs of the year were SYSTEM SHOCK 2 and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, two novel games that delivered singular experiences. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 featured first-person shooter gameplay supplemented by complex character development and some incredibly immersive, chilling environments. Interplay's PLANESCAPE was a *D&D* game that used the core BALDUR'S GATE engine, but featured gameplay closer in style to Interplay's FALLOUT series. Both SYSTEM SHOCK 2 and PLANESCAPE featured excellent plots – though they chose different means to present them. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 relied primarily upon non-interactive message logs, while PLANESCAPE conveyed the bulk of its plot through voluminous text conversations with non-player characters. Both methods worked better than one might have guessed.

Interestingly, while the two games were almost universally admired, both were often accused of not being "real" RPGs. While I question the utility of such exclusionary views, I do feel that SYSTEM SHOCK 2 is fundamentally an immersive action game, like HALF-LIFE, but with the character-development system of an RPG. In spite of its involving environments, SYSTEM SHOCK 2 never really gives you the opportunity to interact with NPCs, or the gaming world, or to develop a character with a unique personality. But it's still a great game.

PLANESCAPE has been designated an adventure game by some players, because your character has a distinct identity that you can't alter, and the game emphasizes conversation as opposed to combat. But PLANESCAPE is very much an RPG because, like the FALLOUT games, you are given tremendous freedom to personalize your character, both in terms of character development and by virtue of the choices that you make during the course of the game. The game plays very differently depending upon your character's actions and allegiances, your choices during conversations, and the attributes of your character. The best RPGs offer such unique experiences, and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT is accordingly both a worthy RPG Of The Year and a new classic for the thriving genre.

It's just too bad that RPGs passed the "Ottoman Empire" banner to the Adventure genre. CGW

What Will 2000 Bring?

Nihilistic Software's promising VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE–REDEMPTION missed its 1999 target but should be available by mid-year, as should a presumably extremely-well-polished DIABLO II. Scheduled for a March release, MIGHT AND MAGIC: DAY OF THE DESTROYER adds monstrous player characters and a few gameplay tweaks, but will be the third game to use the same increasingly outdated engine. Several new online RPGs are in the works, but don't expect any to be released during 2000 due to the extended development time associated with these complex games. At least a couple *D&D* games will be released (four are scheduled, but expect ambitious projects like NEVERWINTER NIGHTS to slip into 2001). Hasbro should also officially announce its new *D&D* games soon. WIZARDRY 8 should finally make it out, but don't expect to see Bethesda's MORROWWIND. Details of the belated sequel to DAGGERFALL are still so sketchy that it would be surprising to see the game before 2001.

Desslock's Mix

1. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
2. Playing through the original MYTH for the first time and trying not to lose a unit.
3. Despair over FREESPACE 2's lack of commercial success.
4. The shocking discovery of frequently updated Ottoman Empire Web sites.
5. www.oldmanmurray.com, easily the most entertaining gaming site on the Web. No, actually the best Web site of any kind, ever.

For daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

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RPG of the Year.
– Computer Gaming World

Game of the Year.
– Vault Network

RPG of the Year.
– GameSpot

"Easily the Best RPG title to emerge since Baldur's Gate. Direct Hit Rating."
– DailyRadar.com

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INSIDE

SPORTS

by George Jones

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Missing in Action

As we start to think about this year's sports games, Inside Gaming is beginning to feel deeply disappointed and dismayed by some gaping holes in the sports genre. Specifically, boxing and college sports – amply represented on the console side of the market, but MIA for the PC.

Even more frustrating is the absence of explanation from companies like EA Sports, which answered the "Why?" question with a standard evasion: *It's not part of our strategy now; we'll evaluate it later on this year.* But why isn't it a part of their PC strategy? It could be that the game companies see the PC market as more complex, and that they're taking their time developing titles in these areas. More likely, however, it's about dollars and cents; even the best-selling PC sports titles rarely break into top-20 sales charts. So, niche sports like boxing wouldn't generate a whole lot of revenue, even in the best of circumstances.

I want a PC boxing game, dammit.

The harsh, bitter irony of it all is that there are tons of revenue, and low development costs, in the leisure sports categories – bullriding, deer hunting, dinosaur hunting, and three-legged racing.

George's Mix

1. MDK 2 beta
2. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
3. Los Angeles Lakers
4. Timeline by Michael Crichton
5. www.eonline.com /Gossip/

Back to Stats

Old-fashioned, text-based simulations don't die...they just get bought up by smaller game companies and melded into existing high-profile products. EA Sports buys little known Solecismic Software's FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL, and sells it via their Web site. Microsoft buys Infinite Monkey's BASEBALL MOGUL – a highly detailed, finance-oriented baseball sim – to fold into the 2001 edition of their BASEBALL 3D. The end result will be an ambitious combination of gameplay and front-office financial management that will be, at least, the deepest baseball game to date.

In a genre that was originally text-based and stat-oriented, then migrated towards more shallow, action-oriented play with the onset of Windows 95, it's nice to see game developers go deeper with their sports-game designs. PC sports gamers aren't scared of that. Hey, maybe EA Sports will wrap FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL into MADDEN 2001...

Home Run Derby–the TV Show

Electronic Arts' real-world sports connections are like the recent spate of teen movies: They keep on coming. In addition to their plans to allow gamers to play along with the pros in TIGER WOODS GOLF, EA Sports revealed yet another way in which they will tie major league sports, television, and gamers together. Their latest scheme involves ESPN, which is making sports news of its own by remaking one of the sporting world's classic TV shows, *Home Run Derby*. The original show aired in the late '50s and early '60s and featured such stand-out talent as Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, and Hank Aaron competing in nine-inning home run contests at Wrigley Park in Los Angeles. Hearing the pleas of baseball fans who caught the black-and-white reruns of the original show, ESPN is reviving the *Derby* next baseball season. The new show will be filmed in Las Vegas and will include some of MLB's brightest stars.

Never one to miss out on a celebrity-driven tie-in, EA Sports will be featuring this official Home Run Derby in the 2001 edition of TRIPLE PLAY, which should be out any day now. Even better, you'll also be able to play with legendary historical players.

For a great breakdown on the history of the original Home Run Derby, check out: **www.sabr.org/old/hr-derby.htm**.

Summer Games 2000

Unless you're from Europe, the land of Eidos' best-selling soccer sim CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER, Eidos and the sports genre appear to be as unlikely a combination as politicians and honest answers. But this may change later this year, when Eidos releases the first in their line of Olympic-based games, built on a license from the International Olympic Committee.

Remembering how much fun we had with games like DECATHLON, HYPER SPORTS, and SUMMER GAMES, we're praying to the gaming gods that Eidos can deliver the combination of killer graphics and key-pounding multiplayer action we crave in their Summer Games title. Some of the events we've heard about include the 100-meter dash, the hurdles, the javelin throw, the high jump, swimming, diving, cycling, and skeetshooting.

At the least, Eidos should be applauded for not going the deer hunting, skydiving, or bullriding route.

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Eidos (Action) Release: 3/00 PC CD — $32.95

COMPUTER GAMES: ACTION

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Battlezone 2	12/99	$39.99
Battlezone: Red Odyssey	04/99	$28.95
C&C Renegade	03/00	$44.99
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Delta Force 2	11/99	$37.95
Descent 3	06/99	$26.99
Descent Freespace	06/98	$11.95
Descent: Freespace 2	10/99	$28.95
DF 2 Jedi Knight wSith	09/98	$28.95
Drakan	08/99	$29.99
Half Life	11/98	$19.95
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Eidos (Action) Release: 4/00 PC CD — $32.95

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Mindscape (Simulation) Release: 3/00 PC CD — $47.95

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Nintendo (Strategy) Release: 4/00 N64 — $49.95

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Working Designs (Roleplaying) Release: 3/00 PSX — $56.99

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Mindscape (Strategy)
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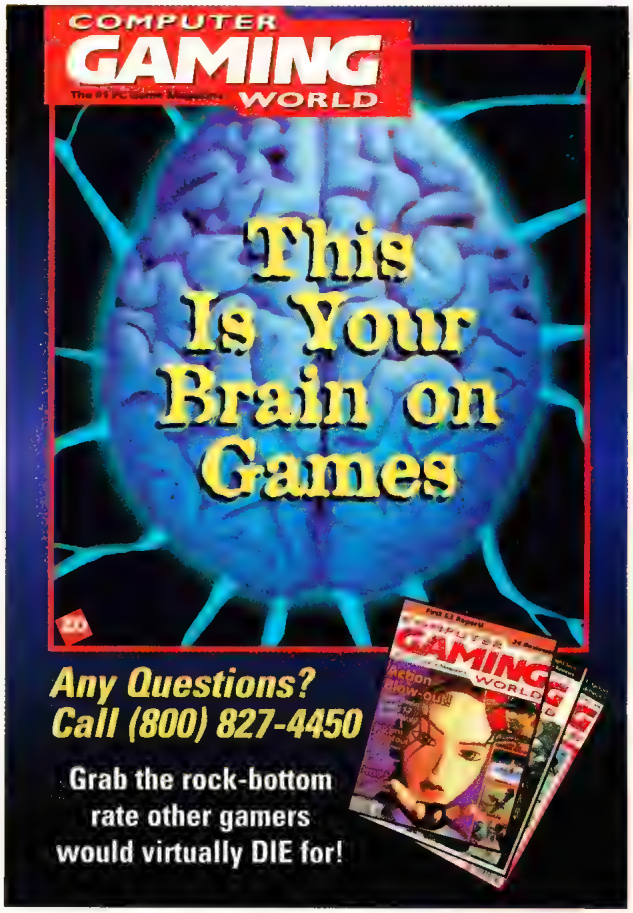
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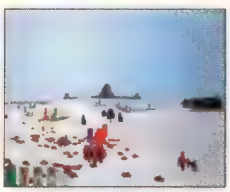

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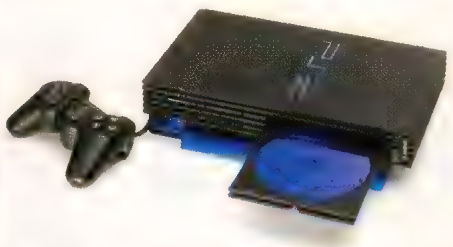

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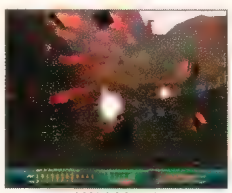

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by Jeff Green

The New Deathmatch King

Jeff Wins His First Deathmatch Ever, and Now He Won't Shut Up

Ladies and gentlemen, say hello to the new *CGW* Deathmatch King. Yes, I, Jeff Green, CGW's longtime designated cannon fodder, the perennial doormat, the frag count bridesmaid with a nightmarish, beyond-embarrassing three-year record for futility, have begun the new century in an awesome, transcendent, triumphant blaze of glory.

On January 25, 2000, at approximately 5:20 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, on the 12th floor of an unassuming office building in downtown San Francisco, a modern miracle occurred: I, Jeff Green, 38 years old, won a *CGW* UNREAL TOURNAMENT deathmatch. Let me repeat that: *I won a CGW UNREAL TOURNAMENT deathmatch.* Won—as in, got the most frags. Won—as in, did better than everyone else and ended the match in first place.

Yes, it was just one time. Yes, I have since sunk back to my rightful place between the bots and the bottom of the list. But I don't care. At all. If my longtime tormentors—those trash-talking, odd-smelling, droop-shouldered goons who write this magazine—think that I'm not going to take this opportunity to gloat about it in public, no matter how small the victory, well, then they just don't know how petty and egotistical I can be. So, to the losers of that never-to-be-forgotten (by me) deathmatch—Shaft, Ruben Kincaid, Squirtle, Tommy Poop, and Dairy Queen—I would like to take a moment here to present you all with a small token of my appreciation. *[ART: insert photo of my ass here].*

■ ■ ■

Maybe you don't know what it's like. Maybe, like some of the guys here, you win at these multiplayer games all the time. Maybe you're saying to yourself, "This is embarrassing. One victory? Woop-dee-freakin'-doo." Well, let me tell you something for nothing, bub. First of all, do not swear on my page. This is a family column. Second, you must realize what a profound shift in my worldview this victory represents. You see, long ago, as far back as the distant days of QUAKE, I had achieved an inner peace, a Zen-like state of tranquility, over my inability to win a *CGW* deathmatch.

Although I arrived at the *CGW* office in 1996 with a big head (and I mean literally a big head—I had to have an operation), I soon realized that, though I used to be great, either my gaming skills had begun their inevitable decline, or these guys were just way better than me. This was a bitter pill to swallow, and I coped, at first, by constructing plausible rationalizations.

These guys are all younger than me, I would tell myself. Maybe after they have sex for the first time their gaming skills will decline too, I thought. But, before long, this was not good enough. When it became clear that my skills were such that I might *never* win, I did what any normal person in my circumstance would do: I consulted a swami.

Yes, many days and nights I spent atop a mountain in Tibet with renowned QUAKE swami Raji "DeTHSkuL" Fragaahaaaaji. For three weeks we sat there, exchanging not one word. Silent meditation and prayer filled most of our days. Deathmatching on our portable LAN filled the rest. We analyzed every aspect of my QUAKE skills: my mouse-looking, my rocket jumping, my circle-strafing. Finally, after one month of silence, Raji Fragaahaaaji, in the light of the full moon, spoke at last, in a barely-audible whisper: "You have a problem, my young friend." He paused, belching loudly. "Excuse me—is mountain air." He adjusted his turban and continued: "The problem is this: You suck. That will be $5,000 please."

■ ■ ■

So, how did I finally do it, then? What did I do right on that recent, glorious day in January? We may never know. Certainly, hiding in the shadows with the Redeemer helped, but it was more—much more—than that. Think of some of the great moments in recent sports history—Michael Jordan draining his final shot in the NBA Finals, Kurt Warner launching that amazing bomb to Isaac Bruce in the Super Bowl—and you have some idea what happened to me that day at *CGW*. Simply put, I was "in the zone." I was at one with my weaponry. The level was mine. It was, for one time only, Jeff Green's house.

"These guys are all younger than me, I would tell myself. Maybe after they have sex for the first time their gaming skills will decline too..."

Let my victory be an inspiration to you all. Never give up, no matter how much of a loser you are. Like other unlikely heroes before me—Moses, Joan of Arc, Leon Spinks, Yanni—I am living proof that no matter who you are, no matter what your abilities, even you can rise up and get your moment in the sun. And if that doesn't work, you can always do what I did: Turn on God-mode, and cheat.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the day of his "victory" was CGW's annual "Bring Your Child To Work Day." Destroy what's left of his ego at jeff_green@zd.com. CGW

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